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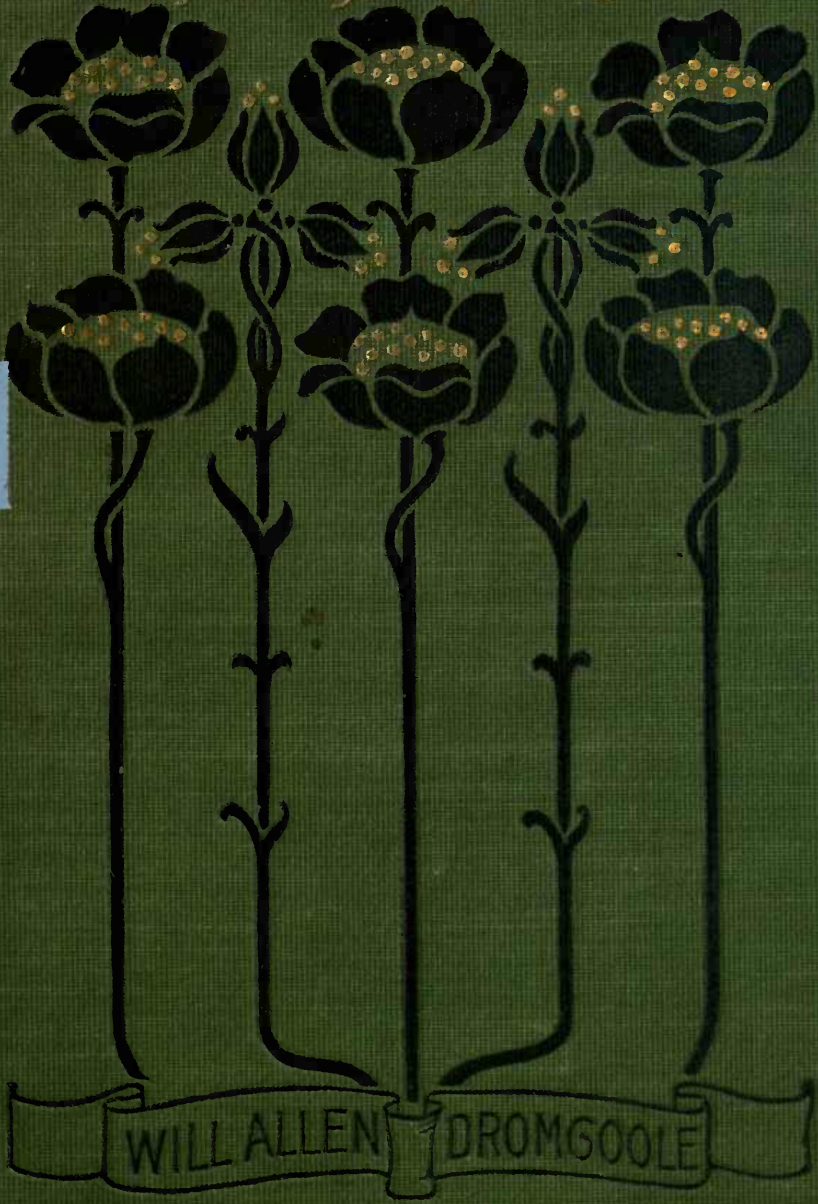

WILL ALLEN DROMGOOLE

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140 PACIFIC AVENUE
LONG BEACH, CALIF.

Cinch
And Other Stories

Books by
Will Allen Dromgoole

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CINCH

AND OTHER STORIES

TALES OF TENNESSEE

BY

WILL ALLEN DROMGOOLE

Author of "The Heart of Old Hickory,"
"The Valley Path," "Hero-Chums,"
"A Boy's Battle," etc.

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To one
who has followed
my career with kind and faithful
interest : who has sympathized with my
struggles, grieved for my sorrows, and rejoiced
in my successes : my friend
Pinckney L. Downs

2061735

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Cinch

THE air was full of plaintive suggestiveness: drifting leaves, bursting burrs, the startled scurry of a rabbit through the crisping brown grasses. Autumn in the mountains; Nature's time to die. A haze lay upon the river, the old, Indian-loved Hiwassee, and veiled the finer line of mountains rising above Sweetwater Valley. Higher up, where the road lay along the rim of the mountain, overlooking the valley, a rider had drawn rein, and sat gazing down into the mist-enwrapped silence in a sort of fascination that seemed for the nonce to illumine his bearded, sunbrowned face.

"Well," said he, rousing from his reverie, "it *is* pretty. It has growed more prettier since I been gone, danged if it ain't. Lord, Lord, but if I haven't a-thirsted for it, as that there Texas parson useter say, 'like rain in a dry an' thirsty land.' The very sight of it's coolin', blamed if it ain't. An' if yonder ain' Sugar Creek friskin' along same's ever to the Hiwassee. Well, well, well!"

He had been absent eight years, yet the fact that Nature had stood still during the interval of his own varied wanderings filled him with surprise. It was like meeting, after years of separation and silence, a friend, and finding his friendly heart unchanged.

"Now, I *do* wonder if old man Stamps's cabin is still standin' over yonder on the side o' the Knob where it useter stand. I'm good mind to ride down there an' see; they're blood kin to me, an' if the old folks are gone, maybe that triflin', liquor-lovin' Jerry's livin' there. An' if I ain't forgot more'n I think, I know a nigher cut to the house than the big road. Oh, but it *is* pretty, the mountains is; an' I've missed 'em; oh, I've missed 'em might'ly!"

He had fallen to dreaming again, his keen, dark eye passing from peak to peak, sighting Cardwells, Chilhowee, and Frog Mountains. The sound of a horn, long, winding, melodious, among the steeps, aroused him. He shook himself, as if the witchery of dreaming had been a material bulk, to be thrown off at will.

"Well, I must be mosin' on; Christmas'll be comin' along here by an' by," he declared.

Giving the reins a jerk that turned the horse's head eastward, he struck off into one of the little cattle-trails with which the mountains abound, laughing the while like a boy to discover how well he remembered the old paths. For two miles he rode on silent, after the manner of the mountaineers. Only once, in the woods upon his right hand, his sharp eye detected a buckeye-tree, and instantly he rode his horse under the freighted, low-drooping limbs.

"The best luck *in* the world, findin' a buckeye-tree is," he told himself; and gathering two of the largest buckeyes he could reach, slipped them into his pocket and rode on, back by the cattle-trail, in the direction of Stamps's cabin on the Knob.

In a little while the woods broke away; the whole earth seemed to lie at his feet, bathed in sunshine and carpeted with purple, and scarlet, and bright gold. He found himself upon one of those odd elevations, neither hill nor mountain, which across the Carolina line are known as "balds," but upon the Tennessee side go by the no more euphonious name of "knobs." Almost at his very feet stood a house, a weather-worn log cabin of the primitive build,—a room on either side, with a broad, open passage between, a shed-room in the rear, an ash-hopper so near that it gave the impression of being a part of the house. A group of gnarled old cedars brushed their dark boughs in a kind of rhythmic time against the gray-boarded roof.

In the open passage, in the full glare of sunlight, a woman was sitting. She was busily at work upon a piece of sewing that lay in a white heap, its coarseness concealed by distance, upon her knees. She had not noticed the stranger's approach. The face attracted him strangely; there was a cameo delicacy about the pretty, pinkish features, and the October sunshine made a warm sheen in the brown-red hair. The face, the attitude, the half-suggestion of weariness in the slightly drooping figure, even the gold-red tints in her hair, all were in keeping with the overcoloured death abroad in the hills. The strange man studied the picture intently while his horse went down the little bridle-path to the gate, his hoofs giving out only a soft rustle among the drifted leaves and dry grasses. To his restless, wandering heart it was like heaven; the restful sweetness of the sad young face might have belonged to the face of a Madonna. It stood out in contrast against his own turbulent nature as the quiet of the mountains contrasted with the wild Western life to which, for eight homeless, danger-crammed years, he had given himself. As he drew nearer, the horse set his foot upon a loose stone; the woman gave a little start, and looked up.

"Good mornin'," said he, over the rickety gate. "Is this where the Stampses live?"

"Yes, Jerry Stamps lives here," was the reply. "Leastways," she went on, quickly, "he calls this home; *mostly* he's to be found at the settlement on the mount'n."

He did not in the least understand her meaning, though he detected the reproach in her voice, and noted the quick attempt to conceal the rash and too ready complaint in a show of hospitality. "Won't you-uns 'light an' come in? Jerry'll be along befo' long, an' while you're waitin' I'll knock you up a snack fur yer dinner."

There are moments that come to all of us when fate stands at the elbow of life, ready to take advantage of the next step made; "fateful moments" we call them, and, looking back upon them through the dust of after-years, we can trace all life, for shade or shine, from the step taken at one of these moments. It was such a moment with him; he hesitated, — saw her get up and go into the room at the left of the passage. She was hiding her sewing, the odd little heap of domestic; he did not know that she tucked it carefully under the bolster of her bed, blushing scarlet while she drew the cover securely over it.

When she went back he had dismounted, and was coming down the little pretence of a walk to the door. He was well dressed. To her, accustomed only to the coarse jeans of the mountains, he was royally clad. A gaudily prominent chain depended from his watch-pocket; in the bosom of a white shirt three golden studs shone lustrously. For a moment she felt almost timid. But the mountaineer is ever king of his own domain, ever the hospitable host.

"Hadn't you better put yer nag up?" she asked, the red still tinging her cheeks. In the eyes lifted to his he saw the liquid lights come and go with vitalising warmth.

"No'm," said he. "I'll just set a bit, if you don't mind, and wait for Jerry. Thank you, ma'am, but I can get my own cheer."

He dropped into the shuck-bottomed chair with a lightness that seemed to her young experience the perfection of all grace. It brought back the fair days of her own first sweet youth, not long gone, when she had tripped lightly over the puncheon floors to the tune of "Rollin' River," in far-away Sequatchie Valley.

She seated herself upon the doorstep, in the sunlight, and he saw the warm sheen return to the pretty gold-red hair, coiled girlishly upon the shapely small head. For a moment both were silent; he, with wonder at the luck that had dropped him down in the company of the very girl, he told himself, that he had "travelled earth over to find."

"Pretty country hereabouts," he found voice to say, at last.

"Hit's fair," was the uncertain reply. "I ain't keerin' fur the mount'n country much. I'm valley-born. I'm a S'quatchie Valley gal."

There was the familiar, drawling sweetness in her voice that had tracked and trailed his memory like a sleuth-hound in all his weary wanderings, in his yearnings for home, and had driven him back at last, homesick, heart-hungry for the scenes that had surrounded his first manhood.

He talked only enough to keep her talking, — the voice was heaven's music to him.

"Yer horse looks like it might 'a' come a toler'ble fur ride," she said, with a glance at the wind-blown, foam-flecked animal fastened to the low fence palings.

"He ain't come so far; he's just from Cleveland down here; he wasn't much shakes of a horse to begin with," he told her.

"Air you-uns from Cleveland?"

"Texas."

"From *whar?*"

Had he said from Paradise she would not have been more surprised. Texas, — that far-off myth-land of the mountaineer. He laughed aloud at her wonder; he knew that to the people of her class Texas was the limitation of all distance, — almost of all life, indeed.

"Lord, I know just how you feel," he declared. "I useter feel the same way till I went there, eight years ago. Now it ain't no more than a canter over inter Kintucky or Alabama. Still," he modified, "lookin' at it one way, it seems a good bit off, too. When a fellow gets homesick it seems like the tag end o' creation. And I always *was* homesick; I always wanted to come back. I'm mount'n born. Me an' Jerry useter play together, — played marbles in this very yard; and when we got bigger we fished together in Sugar Creek many a time; to say nothin' of Hiwassee River. And I just couldn't forgit it. I was always hankerin' for the mount'ns."

The wonder in her eyes gave place to incredulity. "'Pears to me," she declared, "as I'd shake the dust of 'em off mighty quick if *I* could git to Texas."

Poor, pretty young thing; there was a wound somewhere in the young heart that could not quite hush its plaining. He set himself to find it, to learn the nature of the hurt, after which he meant to look to a remedy.

"Would you like to go to Texas?"

he asked. "It's mighty far an' lonesome."

"*Would* I? Lonesome? Psher! *I* know lonesome."

There was no need of further words. "*I* know lonesome." That expressed it all; the longing and loneliness of her life. He felt its narrowness and pitied her, — he who had seen Texas.

"Yet," he said, as though following out his own thought, "it's lonesome; a body can't content hisse'f to love the levels when he's once knowed the heights. You'd be honin' for the hills again in no time. You'd soon be sorrowin' for Tennessee. You'd die out there *for the sight of a tree.*"

"Sorrer ain't killin'." There was knowledge, founded upon experience, in the simple declaration. "Sorrer ain't killin'. If it ware, the graveyards 'ud be full."

She lifted her eyes to the distant peaks; the little complaint seemed to be made to them, the veiled, unresponsive hills, rather than to him. Yet his large man's heart went out to her in sympathy. To her, trouble was imaginary, of course. She was too young to have felt the real fangs of it; yet, to youth, pain is pain, whether it be real or fancied; and so he fancied he pitied her, felt for her, wondered what petty, girlish grief had unblinded her young eyes to the heavy truth that "sorrow doesn't kill."

"Do you live here?" Even as he asked the question he remembered that she had said she was "a Sequatchie Valley girl." Her reply quite startled him.

"Yes, I live here, of course. I am Jerry Stampses wife."

"*Which?*"

He had supposed her a young girl, a visitor perhaps, perhaps a kinswoman; at most a poor girl earning a home for herself by working out, among friends.

"I'm Jerry's wife," — he scarcely heard her, — "married better'n a year ago. If you don't believe it, look — " She had begun to unbutton the wristband of her sleeve; there was a bitter note in her voice, a hard line about the mouth that should have known only girlish gladness. A moment she hesitated, pushed the sleeve slightly up, hesitated again, then, as though ashamed of her impetuous confidence, drew it quickly down, buttoned the band again, and laughed.

A harsh, mirthless laugh it was, that made him shudder, and think of a young fellow the cowboys had hung one night, away out on the Rio Grande. He was a lad just come out from Kentucky, and brave as the bravest. A belt containing money, belonging to one of the gang, was missing; they had searched for it for three days, and finally charged the Kentucky lad with having stolen it. Proud, hot-blooded, and defiant, he had sworn he would die before he would submit to being searched. And they had hung him; they had not really intended to hang him, only, they said, "to scare the little fool into measures." Instead of being frightened when they led the pony under a limb and adjusted the rope about his neck, he had *laughed*, and flung himself from the saddle; cheating them, he had believed, of their triumph. The next day the belt was found where the owner had secreted and then forgotten it. And in the dead boy's trunk they found a little diary, kept in a boy's unformed hand. There were pages and pages of impassioned nonsense; then came other pages of wild ravings because of some one's falseness,—some one he had loved. Ah Christ! that love, humanity's comforter, can still be the root of her keenest agony. The wild determination to run away, go West and be a cowboy. But it was the last entry had caught and held their hearts: "*Life holds for me no hope so sweet as that of laying it down.*" After all, they had but given him that which he sought,—death.

And this girl-wife of Jerry Stamps's had recalled to him the young martyr. She, too, had learned that laying life down is not always its hardest feature.

She drew her sleeve down, holding it fast, lest the inclination to disloyal confidence return with irresistible force.

"Shucks!" she exclaimed, when the silence began to grow embarrassing, "it ain't anything. An' yonder comes Jerry down the road. I can't see him yet, but I can hear his horse. Thar ain't another horse critter in this country comes gallivantin' down the mount'n like Jerry Stampses. I reckin Jerry must 'a' scented comp'ny an' come home; it couldn't 'a' been dinner he smelt, fur I ain't teched it, more'n ter put on the punkin."

She went back into the shed-room, leaving him to make his own introduction to her husband: though, as for that, he had forgotten to tell her who he was and why he had called. He had cared only for *her* story; his own appeared as nothing against the petty misery of hers. He wanted to tell her not to bother with getting dinner for him, but she had not given him the opportunity; already he could hear her among the pots and pans, and already the man of the house was coming across the yard

The visitor rose, hat in hand, and stood waiting. A moment, and the tall, slender figure of Jerry Stamps cast its gigantic shadow upon the floor. A bloated, reckless face, a boyish face despite the marks of dissipation, met his. The two regarded each other intently, before the stranger extended his hand, and with a low, chuckling laugh said:

"Howdy, Jerry,—if you haven't forgot old friends and kinfolks."

"Bob Binder, or I'll be blowed," exclaimed Stamps. "Whar'd yer come from, what made yer stay so long, an' how long ware yer gittin' here? If this don't beat my time! Settin' here gossippin' just like yer useter do eight year ago. Whar'd yer come from, anyhow?"

"Texas."

"Texas? Hell, yer better say; thar ain't no sech great differ'nce as *I* can make out. Had yer dinner?"

"No, but it's no matter. Don't let your wife go to any trouble for *me*."

"Waal, she may go ter a little fur me, then: I'm hungrier'n a b'ar. Hurry up thar, Belle; thar ain't but twenty-fo' hours in a day."

He dropped down upon the step where she had sat, and from the kitchen Isabel could hear their talk; now low and reminiscent, now merrily resonant with some gay experiences of the Western plain. Once, when her husband's laugh echoed through the passage, she paused in the work of slicing potatoes for the frying-skillet, and drew up her sleeve. A bluish, sullen-looking bruise shone revealed against the pink-white flesh. The laughter seemed to have set the wound stinging.

"I ware about ter show him *that*," she sobbed, "ter prove ter him I ware a lawful wife. Any fool 'ud know a woman wouldn't take a lick like that off any but her husband. No other man have the right ter so abuse her." Alas! that man should so mistake his privileges. Her tears fell softly, unchecked; the bitterest of them were for the reflection that she was a wife of but one year.

"Been cowboyin'?" Her husband's voice drowned the soft sound of her sobbing.

"Some."

How restful this new tone that had come into her life for a moment. And how pleasant the outspoken sympathy she had recognised in his eyes searching out her sorrow,—how temptingly, ruinously pleasant.

"I had a ranch for three year, out on the Rio Grande, an' made myse'f a bit of a start. Then I went to San Antony, an' Houston, and Dallis. Saw a bit o' the world."

"What business d'ye foller all that

time? Must 'a' done somethin', jedgin' from the size o' yer watch-chain."

There was a moment's silence before her husband's laugh again reached the ears of the woman in the kitchen. "I see," said he. "Been suckin' of yer paws, I reckin. What the hell fetched ye back here? Anybody as can make money, buy gold chains an' store clothes, an' can see the sights o' the world, ter come a-mosin' back here amongst hedgehogs an' screech owels air pretty bad off fur gumption, that all."

"Wall," said Binder, "as I was tellin' your wife, I got homesick."

"'Homesick,' hell!"

"Fell to hankerin' after the mount'n; the run of water in a laurel thicket; the feel of a boulder under my feet; the sight of a tree."

"Did, eh? Told Is'bel that? I'll be boun' *she* didn't respon' ter no sech slack jaw as that. Said *she'd* like ter git a chance ter see Texas; *she'd* like ter git foot loose o' Tennessee sile one time. Oh, I know Belle."

"I tell you, Jerry," the visitor quietly ignored the outbreak, "I have laid 'wake nights in the corral long o' the horses, with the stars shinin' down on me, that lonesome that I actually *cried.* Cried for the sound o' the wary wind in the tops of a Tennessee cedar, man as I was. Think of it: long, level miles o' land, nothin' *but* land, and wavin' grass that made your brain rock; sunshine until your very eyeballs blistered. Then nights so still you could a'most hear your own ghost go by; moonlight so constant an' so bright, it reminded you of them midnight suns you've heard tell of off yonder in Norway somewhers. Why, it's most daylight on them Texas prairies before the moon goes down. An' fires, — great God! they swoop down, an' skit across them prairies, an' sweep your ranch off the face o' the earth in half a minute. Northers, chills, tarantulas, horse-thieves: that's Texas."

"An' what air Tennessee?" demanded Stamps. "A bed o' rock; a chunk o' mount'ns, with ribs o' iron and belly o' coal that's bought up in a lump by the rich syndi*cates*, who set the pore ter work it at a dollar a day, an' a passel o' stinkin' convicts fur comp'ny. A little runt of a corn fiel' now'n then over which state an gov'mint air wras'lin' like the devil; what's the gallon o' whiskey come ter after state an' gov'mint have had their pull at the kaig? Sometimes the kaig air left fur the owner o' the corn fiel', but more of'n he gits the bare cob of a stopper fur his sheer. Taxes, an' trusts, an' syndi*cates*, an' booms, *an' starvation;* that's Tennessee. Damned if hell ain't healthier, or Texas either."

How different to the other, the wanderer from home. The injustice of the accusation hurt his very soul. His voice, even, when he repudiated the calumny, had a softer tone; unconsciously he fell into the dialect of his people, which he had lost among his Western associates.

"She ware allus mighty sweet ter me," he declared. "Tennessee ware allus home ter me, Texas or no Texas. I honed fur her like a man hones for his wife an' babies. Why, once when I were cowboyin' it out on the Rio Grande I rid thirty mile ter hear a Metherdis' preach, beca'se he allus preached about the mount'n. I didn't tell the boys, — they'd 'a' laffed me out o' Texas. I lied ter them; told 'em I ware goin' court'n'. But I went ter meet'n', ter hear the old Metherdis' talk about the mount'n. He give out thar that day that Christ allus loved the mount'n might'ly, an' that he useter go off an' lonesome on it, all by hisse'f. An' seem ter me I knowed precisely how he felt. Whilst he ware talkin' I could see Frog Mount'n, plain as day. An' I got ter honin' fur home till I fell away ter skin an' bone, an' couldn't sleep o' nights. Lord! Lord! I'd 'a' died if I'd knowed I couldn't come back to *they-uns*."

He waved his hand, a kind of salute to

the sombre, mist-veiled peaks. His dark, deeply set eyes kindled with the joy of nearness. Life might offer broader vistas, but none more fair, more dear.

When Isabel called them to dinner, they kept right on with their talk, Jerry ignoring her presence, and she refusing to allow Binder to draw her into the conversation, though she knew that he talked for her. For her were recounted the midnight rides across the prairies, the race from Indians, the capture of wild horses. For her he described the wonderful cities he had visited, the magnificent buildings, museums, theatres, churches. He even attempted a description of the fine women he had seen, the cotton fields, acres and acres, white as the drifted snow, and corn, bare miles of it without stump or stone to bar or break the level beauty of the picture. He was rewarded with a quick brightening of her eyes, a smile, when he told of the " furbelows an' fine fixin's " of the women ; silk skirts that trailed a yard on the floor, and hats loaded with feathers, costing, to her simple experience, a small fortune. It was worth a trip to Texas to be able to bring back the smiles to that poor little face.

"How long ye goin' ter stay?" said Stamps. "Long 'nough to give yer nag a bite, I reckin."

He had not intended stopping for any great time, but the pathetic little face of his cousin's wife, repeating with silent eagerness the question her husband had asked, bewitching him with its unspoken pleading, held him with a fascination as new to him as it was delightful. Was Jerry really unkind to her, he wondered; was he mean, brutal? Or was it neglect alone that had printed that hopelessness in the fair young face? He decided to stay awhile; at all events until he had satisfied himself that she preferred to unravel her life's tangle without his assistance.

"Well," he replied to his cousin's question, "if you've got a spare peg for my hat, I'll hang it up a day or two. If you haven't I'll stop down ter uncle Silas Moore's down the valley; or else over to Cleveland."

"Silas fiddlesticks!" said Stamps. "Stay right whar ye air; if ye can put up with poor folks' livin'. I'll hitch up an' go fur yer duds after dinner. Thar's the whole o' the roof-room fur yer, and, if that is too cramped, thar's the horse lot, an' you can occupy hit, Texas fashion."

He laughed aloud at his own smartness. He was not sorry to have his fine kinsman stay; the latter's nimble tongue and rare experiences rendered him particularly pleasant company.

"I guess I'll choose the roof-room," said Binder. "Say, Jerry, what's become o' the old cabin us boys useter sleep in? Useter stand in the front yard."

"Waal, the last time I see that cabin, it ware only yistiddy evenin'; it had been invited ter a back seat, an' ware occupied by as likely a fam'ly o' gopher rats as ye ever set eyes on. The ole man gopher ware settin' on the do'step pickin' his teeth with a cedar splinter, an' a-jawin' at the ole 'oman fit ter kill."

"Is the door locked?"

"Locked? Who'd ye 'spect ter lock it? It ain't been locked sence Bragg busted of it open, endurin' of the war, ter git we-uns's meat out fur the rebels ter feed on. Locked? *I* say!"

He got up, pushed his chair back, and crammed his hat down upon his long, tangled hair.

"Look after Bob's nag, Belle," he said, to his wife. "I'm goin' ter hitch up the wagon."

"I can attend to my own horse," Binder interposed. "An' I'd rather go for my trunk, too. There's valu'bles in it."

"Valu'bles?" laughed Stamps. "Paw suckin' must pay out in Texas. Can't yer put a feller on ter yer tricks? Come, Bob, now what game did yer play?"

"We played cinch. I'll learn you how to play, if you want."

A teacup slipped from Isabel's hands, and crashed upon the hard, puncheon floor into a dozen pieces. Had Stamps been an interpreter of the human countenance, he must have seen the pleading in the glance his wife gave their guest. But Stamps saw nothing but the fascination of a new game of chance, and with the gambler's greed he was ready to seize upon it. He slipped his arm through Binder's, and the two walked off together, — gamblers both, to the heart's core.

When Binder's trunk had been put away in the spare room, and Isabel had cleared away the supper things, by the light of a dripping tallow candle they had their first game of cinch. It was a four-handed game, but Binder explained that it could be played with two dummy hands until Stamps could become acquainted with it.

"Then we'll play with the boys at the settlement, maybe. Unless cousin Belle here'd like to take a hand."

A pallor crept over the face lifted for a moment from the sewing upon her lap, and she got up quickly, to leave the room.

"I ain't playin' o' no cards, *my*se'f," she said, "an' thar'd never be none played in *my* house, — *if* I had a house."

"Pity ye ain't got none," Stamps retorted, as the door closed upon her.

It was an every-night thing. Jerry resented Isabel's opposition to the game as an insult to his guest, and at last she learned to be silent. He even forced her to sit by while they two played. He gave no further heed to her, however, and was ignorant that she paled and flushed, trembled and quaked, under the steady, searching eyes of the man calling himself a Texan. Not that she was afraid of him. It was herself she feared; her own poor, starved little heart, aching and breaking with its own desolation. His eyes were full of the unspoken sympathy her life yearned for; she had but to respond once to the glance she dared not interpret, in order to have the wild, passionate devotion her girlhood had dreamed of, her wifehood missed, poured at her feet. He understood her thoroughly; and, while he played to the husband's passion, he played upon the wife's loneliness. At times a great pity for her would spring up in his heart; and more than once, while the beautiful Indian summer drifted into the desolate winter, he resolved to go away and leave her to work out the riddle of neglected wifehood, as neglected wives must, alone. Then her sweet face would beam upon him, and he would declare that it was for her good that he stayed on; for her good that he was opening to her profligate young husband another road to ruin. He saw her growing whiter, frailer, more silent every day; and thought how upon the warm, sun-flooded prairies of Texas his affection would woo the roses back to the thin cheeks, the smiles to the colourless lips. His heart yearned for her, ached to take her away from the daily death she suffered.

She had not been, like her husband, bewildered by his wealth and show. She might have been, had she, like him, had a craving for such. But she did not have; yet had he assailed her chiefest weakness, also, her craving for affection. If he could have assured her a taste of the real blessedness of the wifehood that had been her dream and her delusion, she would have followed him to the earth's ends gladly.

One afternoon he came upon her as he had seen her first, in the sunshiny passage, the little bundle of sewing upon her knees, her hands folded idly upon the small, white heap, her fathomless eyes fixed upon the distant peaks of mountains. Jerry had been off on a drunken spree for three days.

Isabel started, and crushed the coarse domestic under her palms when Binder stopped at her side and stood looking down upon her with that strange, compelling gleam in his eyes.

"Cousin Belle," said he, "this is a mighty hard road you have elected to travel in."

Her bitterness of heart found outlet in words at last: "This here *cinch* o' yours ain't makin' of it any more easier, as *I* can see," she replied.

He placed his hand lightly upon her bright, bowed head, stroking the soft waves gently.

"Ain't it, Belle?" he said. "Then I'll ought to go away, an' not bother you about it. I meant it for good; I swear it. I meant it; I played it so's I could stay along here, an' kind o' look after you, Belle. 'Peared to me you war lonesome. I didn't mean to worry of you, cousin, an' I'll go away if you say so; to-day, *now*."

Without a word, she seized his hand and carried it to her lips, held it there, and burst into tears.

So in the heart of a neglected woman is one touch of tenderness enough to sweep away the barrier of all bitterness.

"Never you mind, now," he said, reassuringly. "Don't you worry. I'm a-thinkin' of how to pleasure you, constant. That's what I'm here for, just to help you. You just trust to me, cousin Belle."

"I can't," she sobbed. "I can't never trust ter nobody any more. My trust air all killed, killed, *killed*. It's been so long since anybody tried to pleasure me, 'pears like I've clear forgot the feel of pleasure."

He took her hands in his, pressing her head against his side. There was an odour of musk in his clothes. Even in her sorrow she noticed the perfume, and thought what a great thing it was to be a man, and free, — free to go to Texas, where life was all glitter and perfume.

She did not observe that the bundle of work had slipped from her lap and lay upon the floor. But Binder, whose keen eyes lost but little, saw the scrap of domestic as it fell; shaken out of its wrinkles, he saw it take the shape of a little shirt, a tiny baby garment, and he understood, for the first time, that she was soon to become a mother. For a moment he was dumb. That little muslin shape, telling in unspoken pathos the story of the untried, unshared, uncomforted motherhood, shamed and silenced him. Then his hot anger was kindled against the man who was to be father to the little unborn babe. To be alone, abused, neglected, at a time like this! no wonder she went about the place like a doomed soul, ready to accept any refuge offered.

"I'm going to fetch you away from here, Belle," Binder broke out, fiercely. "I've heard his talk to you when he was drunk; an' when he's sober, he's off, neglectin' you shameful. I'm goin' to fetch you away from here, away from Tennessee; away to Texas, where they string up a fellow for wife-beatin', same's a bologna sausage. I've got money, Belle, lots of it; enough to give you rest the balance of your days. You'll go back with me, won't you, Belle?"

Go? The temptation lay before her weary eyes a golden pathway, straight from her darkness into day's perfection. Safety, shelter, peace, *love.* Women will barter heaven for these things.

"I — dunno," she faltered. "I ware not thinkin' o' that. I dunno what Jerry'd do if he knew this. Kill me plumb, I reckin."

"I'll make him give his consent."

"*Make Jerry Stamps?*" She gave her head an unconscious little lift that made him laugh outright.

"Well, I *can*," he said. "I've got the screw will press him. Will you go if he gives his consent?"

He saw the hesitation, the wavering; the temptation had its charms. He slipped his arm about her shoulders and with a sudden swift movement stooped and kissed her, full upon the parted, trembling lips.

The effect was electric; she bounded like a startled fawn to her feet, eyes ablaze, the delicate nostrils distended, lifted her arms, dropped them; the white lid fell under his passionate glance, and she saw the little brown domestic shirt lying upon the floor, between them.

The rebound came with quick, delicious thrills, that swept through her whole body. The motherhood awoke, and seemed to whisper presciently of the craving for affection that was soon to be satisfied, when baby fingers should press the no longer lonely bosom. She shook off his touch upon her shoulder, stooping to regain her treasure:

"I dunno," she said, sharply. "I dunno anything. I don't even know what I ware sayin' of."

She covered her blushes with both hands, the little shirt against her cheek, and staggered away from him. He heard the latch fall heavily into its place as the door of her room closed upon her.

For days he did not see her again, except when Jerry was about. And the autumn faded; the time of Christmas drew near, and with it came the time of her deliverance.

He thought she grew sadder, more thoughtfully quiet; she no longer ran away when she found herself alone with him. She was too weary to contend against her temptation. And he offered it her constantly, in a thousand little careful acts which her condition rendered her doubly capable of appreciating. But when he pleaded with her to fly with him, she always gave him the same uncertain reply:

"Wait till after Christmas; I'll tell you after Christmas."

"But if I get his consent?" he urged, shrewdly.

"His consent means that he flings me off," was her thought. Then aloud: "Oh, yes! I reckin I'll have ter go if he gives his consent, — after Chris'mas."

The hours were days while he waited, and the effort to keep up the good feeling between the husband and himself became indeed an effort. Yet he never once left off trying to hold the confidence of the man whose peace he was about to slay. He held him in his toils as a snake holds its victim. If Binder was late joining him at the store, where they played cinch with the men there, Jerry would walk the floor, and rage for him like a youth for his first sweetheart. The game ended, he would call to him, "Tell us about the night ye rode ter the ranch before the prairie fire, Bob;" and he would enjoy the interest expressed in the recital as keenly as though it had been his own story they were applauding. And all the while he drank, drank, drank; with his last glass reminding Binder to take him home to bed all right. There was scarcely a night that he was not in his power; scarcely a night that he could not have dropped him off the bluff, and had a dozen witnesses to swear he was too drunk to have walked down the path without falling off the mountain side. But he restrained himself; he was waiting to get the consent without which Isabel would refuse to go, — waiting for that, and for Christmas. She had stipulated Christmas, "after Christmas." He did not know that she was waiting for the baby, and the effect its coming might work.

As the blessed season drew nearer and more near, his impatience became torture. There were days he did not eat, nights when he thought his brain was giving way. And good St. Hilary's cradle did not swing within the radius of his grasp, to rock him back to reason.

The night before Christmas he sat with the men in the back room of the settlement store, among mackerel and coffee scents, playing his last game of cinch. Others came in and went out, or sat about among the boxes, listening to the talk, — watching the game.

He had not seen Isabel for five days, having absented himself from the house that she might feel the full weight of her aloneness before he put to her his final offer of escape. But he had calculated as man calculates, — leaving out God, who stands beyond man; and leaving out the unexpected, which, they tell us, is that which always happens.

He had plied Stamps with whiskey until his tongue began to thicken; he had told his best stories; sung, laughed, cried "Merry Christmas," "as they do it in Texas," and staked his silver dollars until the eyes of his fellows were fairly dazzled.

It was when the hands of the little dusty clock on a shelf over the door pointed to midnight, that he chanced to glance towards the window, against which the moonlight fell weirdly, grotesquely bright. The next moment he shuddered, and started up with an oath.

He had seen distinctly, pressed against the murky, dusty pane, a gaunt, gray face, — a woman's face. Isabel it was, but grown old; how old and haggard and gray.

"What ails ye?" said the storekeeper. "Somethin' give ye a start?"

"I seen a ghost; a sure enough ghost, Mr. Hartson. Its face was pressed against that window yonder."

"You seen the devil," laughed Stamps. "Mighty quare, a feller come from Texas not ter know his friends when he meets 'em."

This raised a laugh in which Binder did not join. At that moment a fleshless, ghoulish hand appeared, and tapped against the pane.

"There! there it is again. Look for yourself. See its hand, like a yellow bone, at the window."

They did look, every one of them, and they saw the ghost's face return; it was close against the pane.

"Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!" a quavering voice called.

He half rose, with an oath. "What the devil's ter pay out thar?" he demanded.

"Jerry, I've come from my granddaughter Is'bel. Thar's a mighty fine boy down to you-uns' place, Jerry."

The ghost vanished, its midnight mission accomplished. The men laid down their cards to laugh, — all but Binder. In an instant he felt his plans give way; his unholy hopes perish before this newcomer, this baby born at Christmas. It had come, as life always comes, for good or ill, for better, for worse, for power or pain. Only a babe's life; a thread that a breath might snap in sunder. A tiny thing; the babe's head had not learned the pressure of the mother's breast, nor its lips the secret of milk drawing. Young; one of God's little ones. The Christmas sun would be the first of suns to give the little strangeling welcome into the world it shone upon, and in which he, God willing, would have the right to shine also. Through every chink and crevice the golden rays would come rejoicing; searching for the babe born in the cabin, as once in old Judea the startled stars stood still before the babe born in a manger.

The tallow candle sputtered and flared, and cast the shadows of the gamblers upon the bare brown wall, grotesquely. But the game had lost its flavour. It was the babe's doing.

"Well," said Hartson, "I reckon it's about time ter quit; Jerry'll be wantin' ter git off home ter see his heir."

Clearly Stamps had no idea of allowing himself to be teased; he tilted his chair, his boot heels fastened securely upon the lowest rung, and with his largest air of bluff said:

"Got mighty keerful o' Jerry all't once. When I git so blamed anxious ter go home as not ter be able no ways ter stand it, I'll notify the crowd. Pass that thar jug over here, Texas. An' deal the cyards, Jim."

"Naw," said Hartson, "naw, he won't. It's time ter stop. Ye ought ter go home ter yo' sick wife. If me an' Jim stop, you-uns'll be bound ter, seein' as it takes four ter play this here cinch. Hit'll soon be Chris'mas day anyhow."

"Well, what if it air?" demanded Stamps. Hit'll come off just the same, I *ex*pect, whether ye play cyards or not. I ain't goin' home till I git ready. I ain't *never* goin' if I don't feel like it."

Binder's dark eyes emitted flashes; he was thinking of the woman in the cabin, alone in her hour of trial, save for the old grandmother, whom she had sent, upon her last hope of enticing the ungracious father to his home, with the news of the baby's coming.

The stragglers got up and went out, followed by Hartson, who declared he was going to close up. Only Jerry and Binder remained in the back room.

"Take another drink, Jerry," said he. "One more for lagniappe, as they say in Houston; we call it 'luck' in Tennessee."

As the already drunken Stamps lifted the jug to his lips, Binder added: "That's what a man gits fur bein' married. Now look at me: I can go all the world over if I'm so minded. Better trade 'em off, Jerry. Say the word, an' I'll trot 'em off ter Texas ter-morrer an' give you your freedom. Or, better,"— he leaned forward and half whispered in Stamps's ear,—"I'll give you-uns the money ter light out, an' I'll stay here in your stead."

Stamps lifted his eyes; in a twinkling Binder had lowered his, but too late. Quick as he was, Stamps had caught the serpent gleam hiding in their dark, unholy depths. In that one swift, devouring glance all the unholy passion, the sinister and secret meaning of his every action since he had come to his house that fair

October morning, lay revealed. This was why he had lingered, this the foundation of all his fine talk, and finer professions of friendship. For this he had tossed his money constantly before the bewildered eyes of the victim he was making ready to stab. It was all plain reading to Stamps. He lowered his right hand, and lifted it to the table again; the sickly candle rays reflected the glitter of steel where the muzzle of his pistol shone beneath his broad, brown hand.

"You damned son of Satan," he hissed. "So that air yer game, air it? Be still thar; move a finger, an' I'll blow yer blasted brains out fur ye. Cinch! ye think ye've got a cinch on a feller's soul, I reckin. Damn ye! Ye Texas gintleman ye,—ye're a damned Tennessee sneak-thief, that's what ye be, gol-darn yer black heart, ye."

Binder had half risen, his hand upon his hip. The two men who had made partners for the others came rushing back to separate the angry cousins. They even got Binder's pistol from him, leaving him helpless, at the mercy of the man he had wronged.

It was scarcely a glance that Stamps cast upward, into the dingy rafters, festooned with the web of the spider, and ornamented with the nests of wasp and dirt dauber. But in that glance he saw, beyond, behind the gray, gauzy spiders' web, the dust and soot, a woman's face, pictured against the smoke-discoloured boards; a face full of unspoken reproach; eyes in which hope's hard death was reflected plaintively. It was the face of the woman for the possession of whom a professional gambler had offered him money.

"God!"

The quick, stifled exclamation burst from his lips in spite of his effort to restrain it. It came to him like a knife thrust, this cruel, barbarously inhuman thing that he was doing; leaving his wife, —his wife who had lain upon his heart, and had once believed him tender,—leaving her to the pity, the confidence, the insulting affection of a man whose extremest sense of honour boasted no loftier height than the gambler's table. What a travesty was he upon the sacred name of husband, and of father,—for he *was* a father. He had not thought of that before, and as his heart whispered the blessed word, he felt the warm thrill of conscious fatherhood creep through him,—something new, and strange, and indescribably sweet.

Slowly he rose, his hand still grasping the glittering weapon, his keen eyes never for an instant turned from the startled man who had too rashly risked his last throw of the die upon which his fate swung dependent. Amid breathless silence he lifted, poised the weapon: "I give you," he said, in low, even tones, "jest three minutes ter quit this country. Open that door thar, Hartson. Git up; take that path up the mount'n, an' the fewer stops ye make this side o' Texas the better it'll be fur yer health, ye cussed runaway ye."

A moment, and the tall, skulking figure disappeared like a black shadow in the white moonlight that lay upon the mountain.

In the chill gray of the Christmas dawn Stamps lifted with trembling fingers the latchstring of his own little cabin. As he did so there came to him the faint cry of a little child, a baby. Again that delicious sense of fatherhood swept his being; again he remembered that other Christmas babe in far-away Judea. With noiseless step he entered; a slow fire burned in the deep old fireplace. An iron lamp swung by a rod from the sooted jamb, a tiny blue blaze sputtering a protest against the liquid grease that threatened its extinguishment. The old grandmother, who had tramped up the mountain with news of the babe's birth, nodded in the corner, her fireless pipe held fast between her toothless gums.

Jerry seized the lamp, and carried it to the bedside. Isabel's bright head lay like a heap of spun gold upon the pillow; the lamplight brought out all the hidden, burnished beauty of the soft, girlish tresses. The blue reflection of the blaze fell upon her face, tingeing it with daintiest sapphire; it bathed her bosom, bare and white, showing him the tiny head pillowed against the exquisite fairness, in dreamless, infant slumber; it stole beneath the mother's eyelids and they opened.

She smiled and put out her hand, to lay it on his bosom: "Hush," she whispered, "else you'll wake our baby."

Our, not *mine*; the simple words touched him as no sermon could have done.

"God!"

It was not spoken as he had been wont to speak the name of God; it was more a breath of reverence that had come with the babe at Christmas time. He drew nearer, almost afraid of the little bundle of humanity that had come to claim his sonship.

Isabel's glad eyes waited his approval; he read the motherhood beaming in their honest depths, and knew the man he had sent stumbling out across the mountain would not be missed in the heart the babe had come to fill. The neglected wife might fall a victim to the tempter, but never the worshipping mother.

Many thoughts awoke in his heart, holding him silent. To Isabel his silence held a different meaning; she withdrew her hand, turning her face from him, and speaking for the baby at her breast:

" If yer ain't got a word o' welcome fur us, Jerry Stamps, I reckin we'll have ter do without it," she said, sharply.

He laid his hand upon her head, stroking it gently; it was the first time she had ever seen him embarrassed.

" I can't think of a blessed thing ter say, honey, exceptin' of jest 'Christmas gift.' "

She laughed softly, like a happy child, and lifting her arm, placed it about his neck, drawing his rough, red face down to her own soft cheek.

"We're goin' ter be mighty happy now, I reckin," she whispered. "An' I'm mighty glad he come at Chris'mus; 'pears like he's almost of some kin ter Christ."

And who shall doubt the mission of the two, at all events, was one, — a mission of love, humanity; a message of "good tidings of great joy," of peace to all and good will?

The
Leper of the Cumberlands

FAR above the valley, in solitary grandeur, rises the weird old summit of the Milksick Mountain.[1] Too distant to claim kinship with the Cumberlands, too remote to be named among the brotherhood of the Great Smokies, it stands alone, — a monarch without subjects, a banished king of a proud old range, trending off to the eastward, ever away from its accursed companionship. It presents an awesome front, even in its affliction, refusing baser fellowship than the clouds which sometimes drop a kindly veil across its rugged brow. The very fence surrounding it has a pitiful significance, as though it said, "Set Apart!" "Stricken!"

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[1] This mountain, as described, may be found in White County, Tenn. The secret of the Milksick poison has never been discovered, though scientists are constantly at work seeking to unravel Nature's great mystery. — W. A. D.

The verdure, true, is always green there, summer or winter, making a tantalising temptation for the cattle constantly grouped without the bars, watching with longing eyes the hardy luxuriance which crowns the Milksick Mountain. But woe to the cattle venturing beyond the prohibitory bars! Woe to the cattle, and woe to the lips that drink of their milk!

It had brought woe enough, indeed, to the humble dwellers of the valley around about, had this "mountain of poison," as they called it; and one by one, as the deadly Milksick had left its mark upon them, the afflicted families had moved farther on, and away from the dangerous locality, until only grandad Corbin's little cabin remained in the shadow of the "Stricken Monarch." This is the name scientists have given it; for the Milksick Mountain has baffled science, lo, these years.

To the people in Bear Cove it is known as the "Leper of the Cumberlands;" and what to do with it, how to protect themselves from its uncomprehended curse, was a question finally settled by the erection of a great fence entirely surrounding it, and made doubly secure by placing a fine of one hundred dollars upon the hand lifted to lower the bars, for any cause whatsoever.

The fence might be scaled at will, but the bars were not to be removed, lest by a slip of man's memory the cattle should find an opening into the deadly pasture. True, the bars might have been dispensed with altogether, only that the mountaineer *never* dispenses with them; and the fine was found to be an ample protection.

Secure in this safeguard, grandad Corbin and his wife, granny, had dwelt for more than fifty years under the shadow of the mountain guarding the eastern pass to Hickory Valley.

Poor grandad spent much wonder upon the nature of the poison which affected the bright, tender growth; but to granny it was neither a matter of worry nor conjecture.

"I air not questionin' o' the Lord's doin's," she would declare. "He made the Milksick ez it air, so I reckin it air all right, bein' ez I ain't never heeard ez he ware give ter makin' mistakes. I reckin it air all right."

All right! That is just what the people of Hickory Valley, and more especially that part of it belonging to Bear Cove, would have expected granny Corbin to say.

Indeed, Ben Sykes, surly Ben Sykes, declared: "Granny air mightily noted for that word. Everything air 'all right' ter her. That air the chorus ter her song, an' she air tolerble steddy ter sing it. 'All right;' it air allers 'all right.' All troubles an' ailments that comes ter folks air 'all right,' an' just what it ought ter be, ef a body listens ter granny Corbin. But I'm a-waitin' ter see ef things'll be so mighty 'right' when the trouble lays at her own door. Granny's had a precious little ter fret over, an' it's mighty easy ter say trouble an' afflictions air 'all right' when they air sent ter other folks. Granny's got her name up fur that. *I'm* a-waitin' ter see how she bears her own troubles."

So she had, as Ben said, "got her name up" as a comforter among her humble neighbours. Where trouble went they had learned to look for granny Corbin, and it was seldom, indeed, that they looked in vain.

She had such a gentle way of carrying hope to afflicted hearts, such a natural way of making trouble seem less hard than it was, she was a very welcome visitor among the suffering, was dear old granny Corbin.

None knew this better than Ben Sykes; for, despite his braggadocio and scepticism, Ben had very sad and tender recollections of the day his only girl died, and all sunlight and warmth seemed to have left the world together with the little form they were laying away under the dogwood-trees on the side of the mountain beyond Lost Creek; and when they had left her there alone, under the blooming dogwood, he had crept back when the rest were gone, to weep by the little grave that held his heart. For Ben's life at home was not a sunny one; his wife was quarrelsome, and hard to please; and now that the child was gone, he dreaded what it might be — the place he called home — for himself and his son Ruben. Ruben, he knew, would not stand it very long; for he was full grown at eighteen, and only the week before had threatened to leave "if the etarnal fuss went on."

It was the child had held the divided house together, — the little girl sleeping under the dogwood-trees. The little heart would grieve no more for the harsh words spoken; the little lips would no more kiss away the furrows of care and frowns of impatience. Ben sighed for his future peace as he crept back for a last moment on the little red mound that covered his baby girl. It had seemed so bare and desolate, just as her little life had been. If the grass would only hurry and cover it, he thought it would not be so hard to leave her there. He longed for, and yet dreaded to see it,—the little barren mound. But when he saw it, his heart gave a great bound, and the tears started to his eyes, and ran down his rough cheeks.

"Granny Corbin," he said, "it ware certainly granny ez done it."

The little grave was literally covered with the delicate dogwood blossoms. First the petals, creamy and pink and pure white, telling how the trees had been violently shaken, until the grave beneath them was well-nigh covered. Then there were sprigs of the pretty blossoms, armfuls, grouped about the little mound until it was, seemingly, only a mound of bright blossoms.

It was a very simple thing to do, a very little thing, maybe, but it helped him in his sorrow. He never thought of his child again as lying alone in the damp, dark earth. She was asleep in a bed of flowers. It was a very sweet and comforting thought, and in his heart he blessed the hand that had decked the resting-place of his darling.

The next week she had come to him again, — dear old granny Corbin, — come to him, as she always came, on the heels of sorrow. Ruben had left, — run away; "gone for ever," he declared. And granny had come over to tell him it was "all right" that his son should desert him, and his child should die, and his house "be give over ter torment." He was very angry, and he told granny to "cl'ar out," and go home and learn what trouble meant before she went out as comforter.

“ It’s mighty easy ter tell folks trouble air ‘ all right ’ so long ez it air not your own,” he declared. “ But wait tell it stops ter yer own door, an’ see ef it’s all so right. Wait tell it stops, I say, an’ then come a-sayin’ ez it air all right, an’ maybe I’ll b’lieve ye.”

Ben was not the only one who scoffed, however, and wondered if affliction would not weaken the woman’s faith, but at the same time was comforted and helped by her.

There was the widow Larkins, whose son Jeff was brought home one day with a bullet in his breast, and the scent of whiskey still upon him. Granny had slipped in behind the men bringing the dead boy home; and when his old mother, blind with grief, had reached her hands across the bed in a helpless, stricken way, they had met granny Corbin's warm, friendly clasp come to meet her from the other side.

Sympathy was not abundant in the Larkins's neighbourhood, for many had felt the effects of Jeff's drunken recklessness. But granny did not stop to consider that. Death is death in the household, whether it takes the pet lamb or the black sheep. So she helped to wipe away the blood, and smoothed the tangled hair upon the white temples, and folded his hands gently upon his breast, and laid a sprig of sweet azalea blossoms upon his bosom, and another against his cheek; and then carried his mother to look at her boy, lying so still and pale and gentle among the white sheets and the sweet azalea blossoms.

He had never seemed so clean, so pure and childlike, since the days when he slept upon her bosom, — the far-away days of babyhood. Into the mother's heart there crept a hope, a faith, that was to cheer her always, that he might *perhaps* "be fit to die after all." It was her boy, her babe, come back again, clean and white, in the arms of death.

"It's mighty easy," Ben Sykes said, when he heard of it, "it's mighty easy ter comfort when ye don't know what trouble air. Jest wait, I tell ye, tell it stops ter her door; then ye'll see ef it air 'all right,' though it *air* 'sent of the Lord.'" So Ben said, and said it until others began to say it, and began to wait, without really knowing it, for the trouble that was to unsettle granny Corbin's faith.

And granny lived on in the cabin under the shadow of the Milksick Mountain, "blessed of the Lord," she declared, for her son Ab and his wife and their five little ones shared the chimney corner with her and grandad.

"Not a chick nor a child missin'," Ben declared; "how can she know the sorrer of death an' of deserlation?"

True, they were poor, as the world went, but wealth was a stranger among the Bear Cove people, and granny was as well off as the rest of them. She had the cabin and the patch of ground surrounding it, and "old Star," the cow that had "literally raised the two last chillen, ez her mammy had the oldest ones afore her." The land, true, was a trifle too near the Milksick to be of any great value; for the unknown poison was liable to spread, and had a way, the neighbours said, "of travellin' 'round ekel ter the mumps an' the 'hoopin' cough." But granny troubled herself very little about the mountain. Grandad worried some, to be sure, but after all it was more wonder than worry that made him sit for hours under the low eaves of the cabin, with his faded eyes fixed upon the awesome old summit.

"I allers wondered what ailed it," he said, one day, as he watched the shadow clouds drifting above the stricken height.

" I allers wondered what ailed the Milksick, anyhow."

Granny looked up from the heel she was turning upon her knitting-needles. " I air not questionin' the doin's of the Almighty," she declared. " He made the Milksick ez it air, so it air bound ter be all right, since he done it."

But grandad could not accept the riddle so quietly. For half a century he had lived under its shadow, to wonder at the curse.

" Waall," he insisted, " I'd jest like ter know, afore I die, what it be ez hev pizened the Milksick Mountain."

" Ye can't l'arn it, Obadiah," said granny. " Smarter folks nor we-uns hev been a-doctorin' of it, an' a-wonderin', an' at the last they-uns hain't no wiser nor we-uns."

" Parson Orman, he 'lowed," said grandad, " ez it air a leper, an' hed ter be sot aside, 'count o' its bein' onclean. It ware a likely sayin' o' Parson Orman's ; fur whenever I look at the Milksick, fenced off ther' ter itse'f, it seems ter be a-sayin', 'Onclean! onclean!' ever' time I look."

"Yes," assented granny, "it do seem ez ef the hand o' the Lord ware upon it. Yit, I'm thinkin' it air all right, spite o' its ailmints."

"I ud like ter go over thar," said grandad, "an' look about a spell, an' try ef I couldn't make out what ails it. Some o' the scienters 'lowed it ware the dew on the yarbs, an' ez it ware all right after the dew dried up. But the cattle ez went in in dew time died jest like them ez got in when the dew ware gone. All of 'em went a-flyin' down ter the creek, ravin' mad, ter drink theirse'ves ter death. An' some 'lowed t'ware min'ral in the groun' ez pizened the yarbs above the groun'. But they digged, an' digged, an' thar never ware no min'ral foun', not ter this good day. So they jest h'isted the fence, and furbid folks a-projeckin' with the Milksick Mount'n any more. But I ud like ter try ter find it; 'twould be wuth consider'ble ter find out what air hid over thar in the Milksick pen."

"Obadiah!" Granny's voice was sharp in remonstrance. "Ye hev got no bus'ness ter be talkin' sech afore the chillen. Nex' thing we-uns know Burke an' David'll be lett'n' down them bars; an' who's ter pay the hundred-dollar fine fur the life of me I can't see."

Grandad said no more; but he thought about it a good deal. He had always wondered at the old Milksick curse. But public feeling was against any tampering with the poisonous growth. The folks had suffered too much from broken rails, and bars left down, and poisoned cattle, and deadly milk. Their feelings were very emphatic on the subject. Grandad knew it.

"Ef a cow ware ter git in fifty years from now, they'd say I done it, ef they once knowed I hed been in thar," he said. So he never ventured beyond the bars; discretion was the better part of curiosity.

But unfortunately grandad's caution did not descend to his grandsons, Burke and David, or else they were too young for its development. Long after the old man was asleep that night, the boys lay awake in the trundle-bed, whispering in each other of the wonderful something which grandad had said was hidden in the Milksick pen, and which must be worth so much to the finder.

The moon was flooding the poisonous pasture with her full, soft light when two figures slipped noiselessly through the cabin door, and sped away towards the grim old mountain rising to the left of the garden patch.

Click! clack! the bars were dropped from nervous little hands,—carefully dropped. But when a low "moo" sounded among the azalea bushes across the road, both boys started with guilty fear, and the half lifted rail fell with a crash that seemed to awake the very hills.

Both took to their heels, but stopped,

breathless and panting, when they heard old Star's bell tinkling among the azalea bushes. It was only the cow that had frightened them, but guilty consciences refused to face their fears a second time. They crept back to the trundle-bed where the little sisters were quietly sleeping. It was not long until they, too, were asleep. And while they slept, old Star was contentedly grazing within the poisonous limits of the Milksick pen.

It was " sun-up " when Ben Sykes and Abner Corbin, returning from an all-night fox hunt, stopped at the gate of the Corbin place. Early as it was, Ab's wife had breakfast ready. The odour of broiling bacon came, deliciously appetising, through the cabin door when Ab's wife opened it a moment to bid Ben " come in an' have a bite of warm vittels along of Ab."

But Ben declared he must go on, and was about to do so, when the sound of childish laughter made both men turn and look where the boys, Burke and David, were coming down the road, holding to old Star's tail, and shouting as they came.

In response to their shouts the cabin door opened again, and two tangled tow heads appeared in the light of the misty morning. Polly and Docie, their frocks unbuttoned, and their faces unwashed, but with their tiny tin cups bright and clean, came bounding out at the first sound of the cow's coming.

Within the cabin another ear had caught the familiar tinkle of the cow-bell, and baby Bess turned in her trundle-bed.

Another turn, and the bare feet touched the puncheon floor; then came a kind of swift, right-about movement, a half pull, half crawl, that brought her to the cabin door, where she sat waving her hands and calling "Too Tow" as lustily as the rest.

Ben watched the little ones gathered about the docile animal. Burke was the real milker, and he sat with the piggin between his knees, guiding the streams of creamy milk safely through the tiny cups that were thrust now and then between his hand and the piggin, when the younger milkers found their own efforts a trifle slow. Close to Burke's side sat David, ostensibly "keeping off the calf," — in reality waiting his turn on the milking-stool. Polly and Docie crouched close to old Star upon the other side; so close, indeed, that more than once Burke called out:

"Git back thar, Polly, else ye'll be tromped ter death!" Or else, "Move back, Docie, afore ye upset the piggin!"

The two men at the gate watched until one tiny cup was full, and Polly ran to fetch it to the baby, crowing delightedly in the cabin door.

"I declar'," said Ben, "them babies of yours air a plumb pretty sight; an' ole Star air a wonder fur gentleness."

"Yes," said Ab, "them youngsters would find it mighty dry livin' without the cow." And then Ben said "good day," and Abner Corbin went in to his breakfast, and his family grouped about the modest table.

A frown darkened Ben's brow as he trudged homeward. No cheery welcome and happy children awaited *him* at the cabin in Bear Cove. A bit of broiled bacon and corn bread, seasoned with his wife's ill temper, was the best be could hope for.

"No wonder they-uns kin talk so cheerful," he muttered. "Not a chick nor a chil' missin'. No wonder granny finds things 'all right' allers. Wait till trouble comes ter they-uns, *I* say; jest wait till it comes."

It came, — swift and sharp and terrible. One of those blows before which reason itself falls in the grasp of despair.

Ben himself grew sick with horror when a messenger went through the cove at sunset, telling the awful story of the Milksick poison that had appeared, with terrible fatality, in granny Corbin's cabin.

It was noon of the next day when he visited the stricken house. He could not bring himself to go sooner; he felt somehow as though he had expected calamity until expectation had become a wish for it. "But not this," he told himself, "oh, my God, not all this!"

He had not looked for patience and forbearance in the face of this terrible trial; it was too much to ask of the human heart amid such dire misfortune.

The neighbours had shrouded the dead when Ben arrived, and made them ready for their humble burial. David, Polly, and Docie lay on the little trundle-bed, fast-locked, pretty, sinless lambs, not in the sweet dream of restless childhood, but in the old, old sleep of death,—that sleep which locks alike the lips of childhood and of age, and seals alike the laugh or sigh upon the lips of grave or gay,—that old, old sleep of death.

Under the white sheet on another bed, Bess, the baby that had crowed in the sunshine on the cabin doorstep, lay — a little frozen mountain flower, poor little dead babe — by the side of grandad.

As for him, the old man upon whose silver-crowned temples death had laid a gentle hand, the smile upon his face might have been the smile of childhood come again, or, perchance, the smile of knowledge gratified, when death made clear the mystery that had baffled science, and led the old man to the light through that self-made riddle, the Milksick poison.

Burke crouched in a corner, sobbing beside the bed where Abner watched the course of the poison throbbing in his wife's veins.

Granny moved from bed to bed, where lay the living and the dead, ministering to one, tenderly stroking the marble brows of the other. The blow had fallen heavily, mercilessly. More than once the assembled neighbours sought to speak their sympathy, but words were choked by sobs. She, indeed, the stricken and afflicted, was the calmest of them all. It seemed as though she needed sympathy of none, nor asked for it. But they understood, those simple folk, she leaned upon a stronger arm than theirs.

Once she stopped beside the bed where grandad lay, and lifted up the sheet, and looked down at the calm, dead face of him who had travelled at her side for half a century.

While she stood thus, tearless and heart-broken, a shadow fell upon the doorstep. It was Ben, the scoffer, but silent now, and full of shame.

Granny turned to him, and lifted up her face, pale with grief, and scarred with age. The memory of his words awoke in the poor brain,— words spoken when his own heart lay crushed and bleeding:

"Wait tell trouble stops at yer *own* door, then say ez it's 'all right,' an' I'll believe ye."

The words came back with startling

meaning; her faith was in the balance. She who had preached confidence must now prove her own, and that, too, to this man whose future might depend upon her own strength, sorely tried. She glanced at Ben, standing in the sun-lighted doorway, then at her dead, stretched in solemn stillness under the white sheets.

The poor lips opened to speak. "It hev come, neighbour," she said, "the hand of the Lord air upon me," — she hesitated for a single instant, and the silence grew intense. But if they expected any faltering, any swerving of the faithful old heart, they were mistaken. One faded hand was laid on grandad's marble brow; the other pointed to the trundle-bed, where the dear dead babies lay:

"It air all right, else it had not 'a' been."

There was a hush, and not devoid of reverence, as many a doubting heart took hold again on hope. To Ben the troubles that had well-nigh crushed him down seemed puny things, before that majesty of faith which, wrapped in the fires of pain, could rise triumphant from the ashes of despair to say "It's well."

Old Hickory's Ball

IT was in the good year of our Lord 1806; the season, September; in the State of Tennessee, and the tenth year of its age *as* a State.

The summer was over, the harvests ripe, the year growing ruddy. Down in the cotton fields the bolls had begun to burst, and the "hands," with their great baskets, to trudge all day down the long rows, singing in that dreamy, dolefully musical way which belongs alone to the tongue of the Southern blacks, and to the Southern cotton fields. Across the fields, and the rich old clover bottoms that formed a part of the Hermitage farm, the buzz of the cotton-gin could be heard, adding its own peculiar note to the music of Southern nature.

A cotton-gin! It was a rare possession those days, and General Jackson's was known from Nashville to New Orleans. Indeed, the whole of the previous year's cotton crop had not yet been disposed of. The great bales were heaped about, waiting for the flatboats that would carry them up the Cumberland, down the Ohio and the Mississippi, and land them at the great New Orleans market. A slow trip for the bulky bales. Could they have foreseen the time when the tedious river's journey would be shortened to one day's run over a steel track, what must the big bales have thought! And those gigantic heaps of seed which all the cows in the country could not consume, could they have "peered into the future" and found themselves in the *lard cans!* As for the old gin, it would have groaned aloud could it have known that it was buzzing itself into history as surely as was going there the tall, spare, erect man coming across the field in the late afternoon to see that the day's work was well done.

What a heroic figure! and a face that even in youth bore the impress of one marked by destiny for daring deeds. Imperious in temper, majestic in courage, unyielding in will, he was one born to lay hold on fate and *bend* it to his desires. Yet was there a timidity in that eye which no *danger* could make quail. And when down the lane there came the clatter of horses' hoofs striking the hard, dry earth, and with the horses a vision of long, dark skirts waving like black banners in the breeze, made by the hurrying steeds, the owner of the cotton-gin stepped within the gin house, and beyond the vision of the lady visitors.

But they were not to be outgeneralled even by a general; and straight up to the gin the horses were headed.

"General Jackson," one of the ladies — there were but two — called to the timid hero who had run away at her approach. Instantly he appeared. He wore a large, white beaver hat, the broad brim half shading the clear-cut, strongly outlined features. When he lifted it, Beauty herself could not fail to see the high and noble forehead, the eagle eye, the delicate flush that swept across the patrician features. "General Jackson, I have come in the name of charity. No, no, you need not take out your wallet. We are not asking money."

A smile played across the strong, thin lips. "How?" said he, "doesn't charity always mean 'money?' I was of the impression the terms were synonymous."

"Then for once own yourself in the wrong," laughed Beauty. "We have come to ask the privilege of a charity ball at the Hermitage."

"A *what?*"

"A charity ball; and at the Hermitage."

A most comically pleased expression

came into the earnest eyes of the master for an instant. Only an instant, and then a heavy frown contracted his forehead. A flash of the eye and a curl of the sensitive lip told of the suppressed anger that had suddenly smitten him.

"The Hermitage," said he, "is the home of my wife. *She* is its mistress, and to her is confided its honour and the honour of its master. To her, and to her alone, the right to choose its guests, and to open its doors to her friends. I am surprised you should come to *me* with your request."

Ah! she was forearmed; how fortunate! Beauty smiled triumphantly. "But your servant who opened the gate told us that Mrs. Jackson was not at home."

"Ah!" The frown vanished, and the hand ever ready to strike for her he loved with such deathless devotion was again lifted to the broad old beaver.

"I think," said he, "in that case I may answer for Mrs. Jackson, and pledge for her the hospitality of the Hermitage for —*charity*."

Again he lifted his hat: across the fields the sound of a whistle had come to him, and a servant waited, with polite patience, near by, with the horse that was to carry his master down to the river where the boats were waiting to be inspected,—the new boats which, like everything pertaining to the master of the Hermitage, were to have a place in history.

"Ladies," said he, "Charity is not the only voice calling upon the Hermitage farmer. Our country,"—he waved his hand towards the river where the boats were being builded,—"or one who nobly represents her, is calling for those vessels now in the course of construction yonder."

"Will there be war?"

How the clear eyes danced and shone beneath that question which over and over again he had put to his own heart: "*Will there be war?*"

"We hope so," he replied. "All the

West wishes it, the people demand it, and the time is ripe for it. Already a leader has been chosen for it; those boats were ordered by him."

"Colonel Burr?"

"Aye, Aaron Burr."

The night was balmy and deliciously fragrant with the odours of cedar and sweet old pine. Balmy and silent, save for a rebellious mocking-bird that trilled and trolled, and seemed trying to split its little throat in a honeysuckle bush before the open window of a "two-story" log house set back from the road in a tangle of plum-trees, wild rose-bushes, and sweet old cedars.

Every window was wide open, and from both windows and doors streamed a flood of light, to guide and welcome the guests who came by twos, and threes, and half dozens to the Hermitage ball. They were not in full-dress array, for most of the guests were equestrians, or equestriennes, and brought their finery in the little leathern bandboxes securely buckled to the saddle-horse. Stealthily the fair ones dismounted, and stealthily crept along the low piazza, through the side room, carefully past the pretentious "big room," and up the stairs, a narrow little wooden concern, each tenderly hugging her precious bandbox.

There were but three rooms below, barring the dining-room, which was cut off by the low piazza. The stairway went up from Mrs. Jackson's little bedroom into a duplicate guest-chamber above. Two others, as diminutive, one above and below, were tucked on to these. And this, with the "big room," was the Hermitage. A very unpretentious cabin was the first Hermitage; the humble and honoured roof of Rachel and Andrew Jackson, the couple standing under the waxen candles in the big room, waiting to receive their guests. The master was resplendent, if uncomfortable, in his silken stockings, buckles, and powder, and rich velvet. For, whatever his faults, he was no coxcomb, and the knee-breeches and finery had only been assumed for that one occasion, at the "special request" of *charity's* fair committee.

The vest of richly embroidered silk was held at the waist with a glittering brilliant, and left open to the throat, as though in deference to the flutes, and frills, and delicate laces of the white shirt-bosom. There was a glitter at the knees where the silver buckles caught now and then a gleam from the waxen candles dangling from the low ceiling in a silver and iridescent chandelier, to the imminent peril of the white roll of powdered hair surmounting the tall general's forehead. At his side, proud, calm, and queenly in her womanly dignity and virtue, stood Rachel, the beloved mistress of the Hermitage. Her dress of stiff and creamy silk could add nothing to the calm serenity of the soul beaming from the gentle eyes, whose glance, tender and fond, strayed now and then to the figure of her husband, and rested for a brief moment upon the strong, gentle face, with something akin to reverence in their shadowy depths. Her face, beautiful and beneficent, was not without a shadow, — a shadow which grief had set there to mellow, but could not mar, the gentle sweetness of the patient features.

There was the sound of banjo and fiddle, as one by one the dusky musicians from the cabins ranged themselves along the wall of the big room, which had been cleared of its furnishings, and young feet came hurrying in when the old Virginia reel sounded through the low rooms, calling to the dance.

More than one set of ivories shone at door and windows, where the slaves gathered to "see the whi' folks dance." But prominent and conspicuous, in a suit as nearly resembling his master's as might be, and in a position at the immediate right hand of the slave who played the bass viol, stood Cæsar, the general's favourite man-servant. He bore himself with the same courtly dignity, the same dignified courtesy, and had stationed himself beside the viol in order to have a more thorough view of the dancers, and, above all, of his beloved master. He had faithfully ushered in the last guest, and had hurried to his place in order to see General Jackson step down the long line of dancers and bow to his partner. Not for worlds would he have missed that bow, to him the perfection of grace and dignity.

Two by two the couples entered, crossed to the centre of the room, and bowed each other to their places opposite in the long, wall-like line which characterises the stately reel.

The ladies dropped like drooping lilies for one brief moment in the midst of their silken stiffness, skirts that "stood alone," and made their curtseys to their swains with proper maiden modesty.

Cæsar saw it all from his post of vantage near the big viol, but he was not interested in the visitors, — he knew what they could do. He was waiting to see his master " lay 'em all in the shade bimeby." Of course he would open the ball. He wasn't fond of dancing, but it was the custom of the day, and he and Miss Rachel " knew their manners."

But for once the custom of the day was changed. Cæsar was destined to disappointment. Mrs. Jackson's rustling silk announced her approach before she appeared, leaning, not upon the arm of the general, but in company with a florid, rather fleshy gentleman, no stranger, however, to the Hermitage hospitality. Much to the negro's chagrin, he led her to the very head of the long line of bright dresses and gay gallants, and stepped himself, as Cæsar declared, " like a young cock," into the general's own place opposite. The master stood at the very foot, the escort of a lady Cæsar had never set eyes upon before, and who for the life of him he could not forgive for being the general's partner.

He was grievously disappointed, so that when the florid fat gentleman at the head danced down between the gay columns, and made his manners to the lady at the foot, as gallantly as any one could have done, Cæsar expressed his opinion loud enough to be heard by the very gentleman himself.

"Mr. Grundy tryin' step mighty high to-night," he said.

But it was when "Miss Rachel" danced down in her silken skirts and met the master midway the line, and dropped a low curtsey, her full skirts settling about her like a great white umbrella, and the stately general bowed over his silver buckles like some royal knight of old, that Cæsar's enthusiasm got the better of his indignation.

"Beat dat, Mr. Grundy!" he said, in a low, if enthusiastic, whisper; "beat dat, sah." And Mr. Grundy pranced down again to "beat" the master in the "swing with the right" movement of the old-fashioned dance.

Promptly the general followed, meeting "Miss Rachel" half-way with a second curtsey over the tips of her fingers, just visible under the lace ruffles at her wrists.

"Try *dat*, now, Mr. Grundy!" And this time Cæsar forgot to whisper, so that a burst of applause followed the challenge, to Mr. Grundy's extreme chagrin, for he, alas! had forgotten his bow before swinging the lady.

It was then the dancing assumed something of the appearance of real rivalry.

Down the line galloped Mr. Grundy again, stopped, bowed, "swung with the left," and *bowed again.*

The general had been outdone; even Cæsar had to admit it, and the dancers laughed aloud and clapped their hands at the pretty little gallantry.

But the master was equal to the emergency. Again the stately figure met "Miss Rachel," the couple bowed, swung with the left, bowed again, hands still clasped, and then the powdered head of the master dropped for an instant over the lady's hand, that was lifted to his lips, and the dancers parted.

Amid the spirited confusion of "chasing the fox," and passing under the gates held "high as the sky," and passing back again into line, Cæsar's voice could be heard still sounding the challenge:

"Beat it, *ef* you kin, Mr. Grundy. *Chas*say *to* yer best, Mr. Grundy! Back yerse'f *to* de lead, Mr. Grundy!"

Clearly, Mr. Grundy was not the favourite. Cæsar's "backing" had inspired confidence in the general.

However, if Mr. Grundy was, as he said, "a cock," he was nevertheless a game one. Down the centre he tripped again, flushed and determined, curtseyed exceeding low, swung "with both" hands, then dropped for an instant upon one knee while the lady tripped back into line. There was a murmur of quick appreciation, and all eyes were turned on General Jackson. Would he, *could* he, think of anything so delightfully graceful?

Cæsar's mouth stood wide open. His confidence in his stately master never once faltered. He knew he would never suffer Felix Grundy to outdo him in the simple matter of a bow. But how? What?

Straight on came the general; bowed, extended his arms, when, as ill luck would have it, he set the toe of his shoe upon the front hem of "Miss Rachel's" silken gown, and, rising from her curtsey, there was nothing to do but drop forward into the arms extended, amid the shouts of the assembled guests, emphasised by Cæsar's emphatic—

"Dar!"

He had done a very awkward thing. One of those *happily* awkward things which crown a man conqueror more surely than all the tricks of art.

Nobody attempted to surpass that feat, and when the couples had each in turn passed their parade, for such is the old Virginia reel, and the dancers filed into the supper-room, General Jackson was still, in the judgment of his servant at all events, the master of grace and chivalry.

A sumptuous supper and worthy the mistress who planned it. At the head of the table sat General Jackson; at the foot, the young statesman and guest, Mr. Grundy.

When the company had all been seated, the master rose, his right hand resting upon a tiny tumbler of red wine, such as stood at every plate. He motioned Mr. Grundy, and lifted the tumbler. "The man," said he, "honoured by fate, and fostered by fortune. The man chosen and set apart for the service of the nation. A man whose name shall go down the years the synonym of courage and of honour. The foremost man of the age,"

— and the voice ever strong for the friend, absent or near, pronounced the name of one at that moment tottering upon the brink of ignominious destruction and disgrace, — " Aaron Burr."

There was an instant of intense silence, but not a tumbler was lifted. Insult to the host, or insult to conviction ? was the thought which held each guest; when quick into the breach stepped Mr. Grundy. With one palm pressed upon the rim of his tumbler, and with head proudly lifted in a half defiant sternness, wholly belying the careless voice in which he offered the compromise, " No absent heroes," said he. " In lieu of that I offer Andrew Jackson! the future President of the United States of America." It was said in jest, yet not one but understood that Mr. Grundy refused to drink to the man with whose name one stinging, startling word was already cautiously whispered, — *traitor.*

General Jackson's fine eye flashed ; but courtesy could unsheath no sword against a guest. And after all, it was nothing. A mere flash of words. Aye! yet something whispered that the flash carried a meaning, was, indeed, a spark from that mightier *flash of arms*, that would, ere long, blaze out at the very mention of that name.

The ball was over; still wearing their evening finery the master of the Hermitage and his wife sat over the fading embers, smoking their "last pipe" before retiring.

Cæsar had bowed the last guest from the door, and was about to close it for the night, when the sound of galloping hoofs attracted his attention. It was a single horseman, and he was making straight for the Hermitage. The servant waited under the low piazza, curious but not uneasy. The horse stopped at the block, and into the long line of light streaming from the open doorway came the figure of a man, hurrying as if to reach the door before it should close. He had ridden hard, and had barely arrived in time.

"Is General Jackson at home?" he asked. "I must see him to-night, at once. Tell him so."

The servant bowed, and silently ushered the late arrival into the deserted banquet-room.

His keen eye took in the surroundings with a half-amused, half-bewildered expression. The banquet-table, despoiled of its beauty, the half-emptied wine glasses, the broken bits of cake, crumbled by beauty's fair fingers; the odour of dying roses, smothered in their bloom, mingled with the scent of the undrunken wine; all told the story of revelry and its inevitable destiny.

The stranger crossed the room to the pillaged sideboard, and with the air of a man thoroughly at home found a decanter, and, pouring a tumbler full of wine, lifted it carelessly to his lips, drained it, and with the emptied vessel still in his hand turned to meet the master of the house.

He still wore the finery in which he had decked himself for the ball. In one hand he carried his pipe, over which he had been dozing with Rachel. But the eye was alive now; that quick, eagle eye. The ball had become a thing of the past. And as he stood for one brief moment in the doorway, himself in his gala dress, seemed but another illustration of that indomitable grimness which hangs about a forsaken banquet-room. At that moment the stranger lifted his face. It was a face stamped with the cunning of a fox, the courage of a lion, the simplicity of a child, the ambition of a god.

The master met the cool, fixed eye, and into his own leaped the smothered fire of outraged dignity. He lifted his hand, as though to curse:

"Do you know, sir, that the world is branding you a traitor? And that Felix

Grundy refused to drink your health in my house to-night?"

A sneer flitted across the handsome features, but the low, rich voice only said, "*Let him.*"

It was the voice of Aaron Burr.

A Scrap of College Lore

FROM the old homestead kitchen a voice rang out in song. The dreamy, drawling pathos of the music betrayed the nationality, no less than the sex of the singer.

> "Free grace an' dyen' love,
> Free grace an' dyen' love,
> Free grace an' dyen' love,
> Ter wash me white as snow."

Over and over again, in the cracked, crazy voice of an old woman, a negress; but withal full of a strong, strange faith, that seemed to fix itself upon something unseen but felt, and to cling there, and hold.

The woman was busy preparing the

early supper; for the sun would soon drop behind the ragged old oaks that studded the west lawn, and the master of the house would expect his beaten biscuit, whether he came at sunset or at midnight. And just as like to come at one time as at the other, was the profligate young master.

It would have been difficult to persuade old Tildy that he was *not* the master of the house, although the *old* master's last will and testament made it appear so. Handsome, reckless, and dissipated to the last degree, he was, nevertheless, to the old slave-mammy, the same young master committed to her care by the *real* master, in that same will which had seemingly cast him off. That was five years before; it was *nine* years since the *mistress* had committed the young master likewise to her love and care. He was still young, and the only one of the seven children born to the squire and his wife that had passed beyond the years of early childhood. And *he* had broken their hearts; had begun early upon the downward road, and kept steadily on all those years. Thinking of those years, the biscuit beater made a sudden stop, as if the years, those heavy weights, had snapped, broken by their own heaviness.

The old woman leaned upon the wooden handle, and watched, her face to the kitchen window, the last rays of the sunset creeping across the bare, brown cotton field, and tinging the gnarled oaks of the lawn with purple and red and dull amber. An azure haze followed the sunlight, creeping up from the river beyond the field, — Stone River in the heart of Tennessee.

The face turned to the sunset was seamed and broken, but *such* a face. An artist, catching the fervour of devotion, the magnetic mingling of pain and pride, lightened by the finer lines of faith, the whole mellowed by that chastened patience which is born of love and sorrow, would have held his breath, lest fancy cheat him of an ideal, a *something* in bronze, that should puzzle the world for a name.

She was watching the azure shadows creeping across the cotton field; the azure mist stirred sleeping memories, leading the slave-woman back where the smoke circled above a light-boat, plying somewhere along the Virginia waters. There was a slave-prison, and a market-place; and a woman, a strong, silent woman, who held a little child by the hand.

The woman was her mother, the child herself, a baby of six years. She hid her face in the woman's dress while a shrill voice called for "a bid." A bid for a "likely nigger, going for a song."

"Fifty dollars!" there came a bid. The hand clasping the child's grew cold, the clasp closer.

Then a voice, — she remembered that voice in her *dreams* sometimes, even yet,

— that voice sweeter than music, that had said, "One hundred."

One hundred dollars for a baby! He had carried her home in his lap, before him on the saddle; and the heart of the strong old woman who had held the child's hand had gone with him.

She had crept to his feet and begged leave to hug her baby, "just once, good marster," before she herself should be shipped to New Orleans.

"Don't beat her, marster!" — the slave's prayer still sobbed upon the winds of memory. "Don't beat her! she's only a nigger, but she's my baby! *don't* beat her!"

And the promise given had been faithfully kept by the then young master. "Never a lick shall she have, so help me heaven."

The sunlight faded from the field, the amber and red left the oak-trees, the shadows deepened. Before the slave's eye came the face of one fast in the agonies of death, — a gentle face, — a broken-hearted mother's face. It lay upon her arm.

"My boy," the white lips whispered. "My poor, poor boy! Mam-Tildy?"

"I'm here, mistiss."

She put her black face close to the gentle white one.

"As I have dealt with you, Mam-Tildy."

She understood, true old slave-heart.

"I'll foller him ter de grave, mistiss, an' hand him inter heaben ter yer, ef de good Lord spar's me."

Since then, when duty seemed too hard, and devotion reaped only ingratitude, she heard again, in dreams, the soft voice pleading:

"As I have dealt with you, Mam-Tildy."

And waking, the old heart had renewed to itself the promise, "I'll foller him ter de grave, an' hand him inter heaben ter his mammy, ef de good Lord spar's me."

The old master slept beside the young mistress, in the family burying-ground beyond the meadow, in sight of the gentle waters of Stone River. His proud old heart had broken, too. The tears rolled down the woman's dark cheek as she recalled the last night on the old plantation, when it rained, and rained, and the storm rattled at the windows, and the river burst its banks, flooding meadow and field, until the cries of the drowning things down in the low ground rang through the house piteously.

Such a night! such a pitiless night, and black with despair! An old man waited, that black night, with bowed head, for a step; a boy's careless step; waiting and listening while the storm beat furiously. Oh, these footsteps of erring children! Note ye the hell or heaven they carry! The gray dawn shivered at the window like a frozen foundling; and a song, a senseless, drunken song, reached the strained ears of the master. A reeling figure tottered up the strong old stairs, a shuffling, loathsome thing, calling himself *his son*, and who, but for the will that day executed, would have inherited those fair Tennessee lands, to be squandered in drunken college revels.

The disappointment was *too* bitter. A shot rang out. The old man could bear the burden of his son no longer.

The will left the plantation house to the old nurse, the *baby* bought at Richmond six and forty years before. The balance of the great fortune had been squandered long ago.

There Mam-Tildy's dreaming always ended. She came back to her biscuit beating at this point, to protest, as usual.

"It orter be Marse Hal's house," she said to the dough, crisping beneath the blows she laid upon it. "Ef I cud sell it I cud pay his debts ter-morrer."

That was precisely what the old master meant she should *not* do, when he had tied the property against the young reprobate, his son and lawful heir.

Mam-Tildy would take care of him, but he would not take care of Mam-Tildy; and therefore the will had judiciously set the property in the safer hands.

It was hers, Mam-Tildy's, "during her natural life."

"But it orter been Marse Hal's," she declared; "he needs it mighty bad."

She spread the dough with the cedar rolling-pin, rolling it to a precise thickness and keeping a kind of time to the song with which she had begun her task:

"Free grace an' dyen' love,
Free grace an' dyen' love,
Ter wash me white as snow.
Way ober Jord'n, Lord—"

The song abruptly ended. Some one came up the gravelled walk; a quick, boyish step; a step she knew full well, although it did not stagger now, as was its wont. It *ran*, or the owner of it ran, straight across the piazza, into the kitchen; and although the hand placed on Mam-Tildy's arm shook, she knew the young master was not drunk.

"Hide me! Mam-Tildy, hide me!" he gasped. "I have killed a man, and they are after me!"

There was a boyish ring in the voice, despite the situation, that belonged wholly to Hal Gordon's character; a carelessness which had so annoyed the old squire, his father, who called it "dare-devilism," and which Mam-Tildy noticed even in the extremity of her distress.

She gave a hurried glance around the kitchen, then shoved her biscuit-board aside, and pointed to the large empty barrel upon which the board rested.

The next moment the board was in its place again, she was rolling her dough and singing:

> "Free grace an' dyen' love,
> Ter wash me white as snow."

The sheriff's posse coming down the piazza had detected no break in the song; and the sheriff himself saw nothing odd in the fact that he had to call twice from the kitchen doorway before the busy old negress turned to hear his demand for Harry Gordon, the runaway from justice.

She dropped the rolling-pin with a great clatter; perhaps because she heard a defiant little laugh in the barrel; perhaps because she was, as the officer thought, so taken by surprise.

"Marster," she begged, "don't tease a pore ole nigger dat er way. Ef Marse Hal hab done somefin, shore nuff, for de love ob God, don't stan' dar foolin', but tell ole Tildy an' let her go to him."

She had rubbed the dough from her hands and taken off her apron; the tears were raining down her cheeks when she reached for her sunbonnet hanging upon a convenient peg.

The men were completely disarmed; touched to the quick by her prompt response to the danger threatening the beloved master.

"Go back, aunt Tildy," said the sheriff. "He isn't worth your affection. You can't go to him, for we have not yet found him. Go back to your dough, and don't waste any more sleep on that ungrateful scamp."

They left her, with her apron before her eyes, rocking to and fro, and moaning.

"Ter de grave! ter de grave!" she sobbed. "I promused his mammy. Yes, Lord, *good* Lord, ter de grave."

That night the fugitive received the coins, all Mam-Tildy's ready money, which she poured into his hand, and stole away under cover of darkness.

"Ef I cud jest sell the place, little marster," she said at parting, "de money ud fetch you out o' danger."

"Damn the place!" was the reply. "Only let me get well away from it; it is getting too all-fired hot here to suit my fancy."

He drew his coat about his ears, a soft, fashionably made garment, and started towards the door. Twice he looked back. The old nurse sat in a corner with her apron over her head, rocking and moaning.

She had sat thus, in that very corner, the night his mother died. He went back, and laid his hand lightly upon her head.

" Mam-Tildy," he said, " I'll write to you if ever I land beyond the county jail, and you shall come to me. Hush! I swear it. Good-bye now. If I ever *should* get to heaven, Mam-Tildy, — mind, I don't expect to, but *if* I should, — it will be your work."

He laughed softly, and, stooping, put his lips to the apron covering her head. She could not see that, despite the laugh, the boyish blue eyes held tears; nor did she understand that he knew that never again would he set free foot upon the threshold of the once proud old homestead.

She only knew that he passed out with

a curse and a low rippling laugh, and that her old heart was very desolate.

The next day news came; he had been taken. The man he had shot lived a week, and in two months the murderer had received his sentence, life servitude in the State prison.

She rented the house, and followed him to the loathsome den in the mountains which had been dignified by the name of Branch Prison. It had been by special pleading of his attorney, and for his frail health, that he had been removed to the Branch. *He* knew it was the old black mammy's work. Her little whitewashed cabin stood upon a green rise between the stockade and the coal mine; from either the door or the window she could see him at morning and evening going to and coming from his work. At noon she often went down where the men were eating their dinner, to carry him something hot from her own kitchen. He laughed at her for this, telling her it was as foolish as her old song of "Free grace and dying love."

One evening a squad of convicts coming in from the mine heard her singing, in that quaint, quavering treble, that same old hymn, and laughed, making many a joke of the song and singer. Odd, how those in its worst extremity make the lightest jest of life, — solemn, serious old life with its burdens and heartaches. He who laughs at life is apt to cry out against death. The convicts laughed at the old crone and her song; the convicts, blackened with coal, and with that deeper stain — sin. The one who laughed loudest was a young man of perhaps five and twenty years. Dissipation had been somewhat obliterated from the boyish face by five years' imprisonment and confinement in the underground workshops — the mines.

The complexion was as fair and delicate as a child's; and the hands, which Mam-Tildy kept carefully provided with gloves, were small and white, and delicately feminine. He had changed but little; in all but dissipation, so far as any one knew, he was the same Harry Gordon of five years before.

"Yer mammy's singing for ye, sonny," laughed one of the squad.

"I wonder where she got that queer song," said another. "There isn't so much in the words, yet somehow it makes a fellow want to go home to his mammy."

Again there was a laugh; life is *such* a jest.

"Because it's '*free*,' I reckon," said a third. "It's the only thing hereabouts that is."

"It is the first thing I remember to have ever heard," said Hal, who, as a rule, had but little to say to the men. "She trotted me on her knees and sang it. I think she sang it the day I was born, and I expect she will sing it at my funeral, if mine chances to get in ahead of hers."

Then the squad passed on up the hot, coal-sooted path to the stockade gate, and stood a moment to be counted. The old woman's song still reached their ears, faintly, —

"Free grace an' dyen' love,
Ter wash me white as snow."

The chains rattled, the gate swung back, and the squad went in. There was no trace of emotion of any kind in any of their faces, except in the face of Gordon; he was smiling.

A few minutes later he stood before his cell door, humming under his breath,—

"Free grace and dying love,
To wash me white — "

"What a funny old song," said he. "I wonder what it means, anyhow. '*Free grace and dying love:*' I shall ask Mam-Tildy next visit she makes to my *State* apartment."

He laughed again in that half merry, half defiant, boyish way, and drew the little iron door open.

As it swung back he glanced up at a

bit of dainty carving just above the entrance to his cell.

It was done in Latin, daintily, dexterously done, with his own pearl-handled penknife.

"Errare est humanum."

That was all of the college lore he had carried out into the world with him. All the use he had found for it was to make a motto for a felon's cell. His college course, like his life course, ended in a convict's cell. Ended, summed up, in that one sentence, *Errare est humanum.*

He laughed, as he divested himself of his mining clothes. The cleanly and careful were allowed a second suit; he was cleanly enough, and Mam-Tildy would have been more than satisfied if he had been half as careful with his soul as he was with the coarse prison uniform.

He was thinking of the motto; that little Latin device had wrought so many amusing incidents.

First, Mam-Tildy, when she came to bring the sweet cakes she had made for him, had asked what the inscription meant. How the old face had lighted up when he told her; and it had ever afterward been impossible to convince the old woman that it was a mere bit of handiwork, utterly without heart on the part of the convict.

The prison chaplain, too, had caught sight of the carving, and had straightway come into the cell, his mild eyes full of tears, and pressed the hand of the convict-student, and, kneeling by the little iron prison bunk, had prayed, *prayed*, with the beads upon his brow, and agony in every feature, yet not once opening his lips for words. And Hal had stood by, that old boyish smile parting his daintily curved lips while the old chaplain prayed. He laughed aloud when later he had found the chaplain's card upon his little shelf. The bit of white pasteboard bore his own little motto in Latin, to which the pious man had added in pencil, "*Condonare est divinum.*"

That pleased Mam-Tildy mightily, when he told her about it; and she had teased him to add the preacher's "sign" to his own above the door, but he had laughingly refused.

The "sign" had amused him greatly; one morning, he remembered, a new gang had arrived at the Branch. Among the convicts was a young man convicted of murder in the second degree, and sentenced to ten years in the *pen*. In his native town he was considered a dangerous character; a boy utterly without friends, since the *college career* had broken his mother's heart.

Hal came upon the man the morning of his arrival at the prison. He was standing in the corridor before young Gordon's cell; he still wore his ball and chain, and he was manacled with iron, just as the guard had left him. He was gazing at the Latin inscription above the door.

"*To err is human.*" He had met only upbraidings, reproaches, doubts, revilings. That little Latin device was the first hint of forbearance that had ever seemed to come to him; the first whisper of condolence or of condonation that had ever touched his wretched, ill-spent life since he began his downward career. It came like a breath from paradise. He forgot his chains, his handcuffs, the long score of crime-blotted years. The sweet old boyhood time came crowding back; he chased the ball across the college campus; pored over his Greek and Latin under the sweet old maple-trees.

"*Errare est humanum.*" It was one of those mysterious messages that strike straight for the soul, and, battering its wall of rebellion down, make an abode there. The ten years' term was commuted to five; the five by "good time made" became four; and one morning the prison door swung back and he passed out, a free man.

He had been very fond of young Gordon, fancying that to him he was indebted for his reformation; had wept upon his shoulder at parting, and begged to be remembered sometimes. Hal remembered that he had laughed and pushed him off; the merry sparkle still danced in his blue eyes when the two said good-bye, for ever. They were totally unlike. Strange *he* should have carved the inscription above *his* door: he, so light, so shallow, so indifferent. Even Mam-Tildy had begged of him to "try en be sober, en see things as they is."

"Sober!" he had replied. "It is bad enough to be here, Mam-Tildy, but it is lucky I can laugh over it."

"Naw 'tain't, little marster," she sobbed. "It am like slappin' ob de good Lord in de face. 'Tain't allus right ter laff; it am better ter cry en ter laff sometimes, Marse Hal."

Yes, his scrap of college lore had stood him well. The lady missionaries to the prison had been attracted by it; read a story of high birth, strong temptation, and earnest repentance in the simple words, and gave him special prayer. It was as though a dignified, refined sorrow hid in the old college exercise. All who saw it conceived a tender interest in the fair-faced young convict. A glamour of romance gathered about him. Young girls sought his cell with flowers and gifts of jewels; even the old ladies sent in pretty bits of needlework to decorate the cell of "the poor student."

"*To err is human!*" What an appeal; and to go up from that black hole; and from a soul cultivated; used to the higher walks. Why, it was as though he said, "Careful, careful now how you judge,—the way is slippery, and to *err* is *human*. Your own feet—"

He was very peaceable and good-natured; the guards and wardens all liked him, although they still continued to wonder if the lightness was genuine, or if the man truly had no feeling. He seldom gave evidence of any, either of impatience, or rebellion, or of temper. He always did his work, just what was required of him; never a lick beyond or a blow below the requisite amount. The miners called him a "lazybones" at first; but when they saw that always his work was faithfully and exactly done, they gave that up, remembering how their own went beyond the requirement to-day, and to-morrow fell far below it. Nobody ever thought the peculiarity might have been a lack of ambition, for nobody cared especially; they only knew there *was* a peculiarity. His hands were always clean, conspicuously clean, down the long prison dining-table where the hard-fisted coal diggers were at their meals. He never held aloof from the others, yet they seemed to feel, instinctively, that he *was* apart from and above them. It was because of the Latin over his cell. His was a life sentence; he had no hope of reaching the outside world again, and he seldom gave it a thought, except to laugh at Mam-Tildy's foolish fancies that he would some day gain a pardon by some great deed of heroism. There was a *hint* in these foolish fancies, if he had but considered it. But he did *not* consider, — considering meant melancholy, discontent. So he put aside all unpleasant comparisons and unavailing longings; he read the books the old nurse brought him, played with the flowers sent him, and munched the delicacies left every day at his door, much the same way that he ate the coarse prison fare, and with the laughing indifference with which he had met his mother's tears and his father's curse.

They tried to make a hero of him because of the Latin, but he did not respond to the effort; nothing in him responded to the heroic in any sense. Only to poor old Mam-Tildy, in her tireless devotion, her daily pilgrimage to his cell with clean sheets, a white counterpane, fresh underclothing, never without some offering,—only to her was vouchsafed an abiding hope, a faith that at last, at *last*, the little marster would "see things right."

One morning when, having received permission to do so, she was scouring out his cell, and singing in the old familiar way, he stopped on his way to join the mine gang, and said:

"Mam-Tildy, that is a funny old song of yours. What does it mean, anyhow, your 'free grace and dying love?'"

She paused in her work, and looked up at him from her knees, where she had crept in order to carry her scouring-cloth well under his bed. There was a perplexed, worried look in the faded old eyes. What did "free grace" mean? Free grace and dying love. Oh, for words, words, that might *tell* him the meaning of that grace, that love! *She* knew; her soul had recognised the meaning long ago; but the poor old tongue had no cunning.

She shook her head,—gray it was,—

carefully bound in a white, knotted handkerchief.

"You'll know some day, little marster," she said. "I can't tell yer, honey; ole Tildy ain't got much sense; but you'll know what free grace am some day."

That noon, at the counting of the prisoners, he was absent. There is always a thrill follows the announcement that a convict is missing. Escaped? Dead? Pardoned? Gordon was neither; he was lying on an iron bunk in the hospital,—unconscious, in a deadly stupor; white and innocent-looking as a little child. A little child,—he was like a child in many things; yet he had broken many hearts, his old father's, his poor mother's, and, last of all, Mam-Tildy's.

He had been hurt down in the mine; but before the news had fairly reached the stockade, the old negress was at the mouth of the pit, and would have gone on, right into that roar of nauseous gas and stifling sulphur, only that a guard prevented her.

"Stop, aunty," he said, "you can't pass there."

The old eyes filled.

"Oh, marster, fur de lub ob God, lemme go ter him!" she begged.

"No, come back; the tunnel is full of gas and smoke and falling slate. You can do him no earthly good. Come back, I tell you!"

"Marster, I promised his mammy ter foller him ter de grave itse'f."

She was moving right on, and weeping; not heeding, if indeed hearing, the command to "come back."

"I promised ole Mis'" — the smoke was stifling. Again the guard called to her:

"*Will* you come back?"

"Naw, marster, I won't, I can't," — she was already in, beyond the black opening. "My feet wouldn't turn back ef I tried ter make 'em ter; lemme go!" Her voice came back to him from the tunnel, muffled and seeming afar off. "Fur de lub ob

God, lemme go ter him. I — promised — ole — Mis' — "

The words were a wail of agony and devotion.

They brought him out, however, by another tunnel, and the guard sent some one in to tell Mam-Tildy. When she came back they carried him up to the prison hospital, and all the town knew of the "little student's" injury.

Feeble, and old, and heart-broken, the old nurse tottered to the stockade gate, the tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks, her gray hair forgotten, its covering gone; she stopped to question the guard there.

"They say he will die," he told her, his heart full of a great pity.

But that was not what she wished to know.

"Marster," she said, "*how* wuz it?"

"The slate fell on him while he was eating his noon lunch, — that was all."

All; she sighed and turned away, her last poor hope of heroism gone.

They refused her admittance at the hospital, but allowed her to crouch at the door of his empty cell, just under the old college text, and to nurse her grief near something that had been his. All the afternoon she sat there, moaning when no one was near, and praying always. She had prayed for so many years, poor old black mammy, and received for her faith — silence; silence, that maker of infidels and blasphemers. Yet her faith held; she was ignorant, but it held, held; let the wise and the favoured look to it. It held even while the white face of him who was the object of her prayers lay back upon the coarse prison pillow, waiting for *death*; still the old nurse's faith held.

It was a fair face, so touchingly childlike; the old smile still curved the delicate lips; the smile which had met the ills and failures of life, met death with the same boyish defiance, — a foil to rob him of his terror.

The prison physician, together with the

chaplain and the warden, had endeavoured vainly to rouse him out of that deadly stupor. There was no response, not a quiver of the eyelids to tell that he heard or lived.

"Is there nothing," said the chaplain, "that will arouse him? Nothing that will touch him?"

"He has been here five years," said the warden, "and I have never known him to show the slightest feeling, except one morning when one of the men attempted to play a prank upon his old black nurse. He didn't really show any feeling then, for he laughed at the same time that he cracked the fellow's skull. It was hushed up; nobody held any ill-will against the boy, and the other had made himself obnoxious to the officials."

The physician, his hand upon the pulse of the unconscious convict, turned suddenly to the warden.

"Go bring the old nurse," he commanded.

They had not far to go, and she came

at once, tottering, the old body well-nigh spent. The surgeon was removing the electric battery with which he had been vainly endeavouring to recall life into the benumbed faculties, when the old negress entered. They moved aside to make room for her, for she was growing strangely feeble. Is it instinct that teaches those old black heroines those great, grand strokes upon the chords of the human heart? Is it instinct, like the brutes possess? Who dare insult Divinity with such a charge?

The old nurse tottered to the low bunk, — her gray, grizzled hair made a kind of setting for the dark face. Trouble in every wrinkle; grief, such as tender mothers know, in every motion of the trembling lips; but love, abiding devotion, burning in the fond, faded eyes resting upon the fragile form bound in linen, upon which the blood-stains showed glaringly. She bent over him, no tears in her eyes now.

"Marse Hal," she said, "does yer know me, honey? How is yer, little marster?"

O thou great electric king! Out upon thy puny power, that the whisper from a slave's lip can put thee to such shame! The delicate white hand moved slowly across the yellow sheet until it found the hand of the old nurse, and, clasping it, rested there. The prisoner sighed softly.

"Mam-Tildy?"

"Yes, my lam'."

"Take me home?"

It was the voice, the pleading prayer of a homesick child. The nurse was the only one of the little group whose eyes were dry.

"Yes, honey," she replied, "Mam-Tildy gwine sen' yer home soon; she done promise ole Mis'."

She covered his small hand with both her own, and held it against her faithful old black breast, and sat there, with eyes that saw not, but with a kind of peace upon her tired face, — as though indeed they *had* been transported back to the innocent days upon the old plantation.

"Mam-Tildy?"

"Yes, my lam'."

"Sing!"

She began to rock to and fro and to croon a hymn; but he stopped her with a movement of his head.

"No, no; sing your old — 'free grace' — you used to sing it — in the kitchen — *at home*."

Tremblingly, trustfully, the old cracked voice began, and went bravely on to the end:

> "Free grace an' dyen' love,
> Free grace an' dyen' love,
> Ter wash me white as snow."

When she finished he lay so still they thought him gone indeed, till his lips moved faintly, and he murmured something about "the old college text," and "something" which he said "the chaplain added to it." Mam-Tildy's old song was running through his brain, too; confusing him absurdly; for he was mumbling something about, "To err is human, free grace—divine," and smiling, — knowing that he had tangled song and text. Mam-Tildy tried to help him:

"It's free grace an' dyen' love, Marse Hal," said she.

"I know," he whispered; and suddenly, with strange strength, he lifted himself in bed and clasped his arm about the old mammy's neck, smiling the while, — that same boyish smile she knew so well.

The surgeon took out his watch; one, two, *five* minutes passed; he placed his finger upon the delicate, blue-veined wrist lying against the old black neck, and motioned a guard to drop the window curtain.

"Mam-Tildy," he said, gently, "you may go now."

"Yes, marster, I's raidy. Old Tildy's work am done."

And unclasping his arm, she laid the dead boy back upon his pillow.

George Washington's "Bufday."

"GEORGE WASHIN'TON! You George Washin'ton, you! Ef you don' come 'long here when I call yer, I'll take a bresh broom ter yer, sah, dat I will!"

Aunt June stood in the cabin doorway calling, shrilly and sharply, to a boy at that moment reluctantly making his way to the cabin from the direction of the "spring branch" that skirted the field in the low ground.

"Come 'long here, sah! Don' you see I's waitin'?"

George Washington obeyed reluctantly,

however; for it was the season of the year when trout were biting. The small rod and bucket that he carried told, silently, the story of an interrupted minnow excursion, preparatory to a day's fishing in Duck River.

His mother wore her best dress, a bright magenta skirt and a brown worsted waist; a bonnet of curious shape and colours, and a pair of very white, home-knit gloves. A long, brown barege veil floated majestically from the bows and blossoms of her bonnet.

A large market-basket, and a tin bucket covered with a clean white cloth, stood on the doorstep; a crazy little cart with a white mule nodding between the shafts waited at the gate. In lieu of leather reins a white cotton rope passed from the bridle bit to the seat upon which aunt June was preparing to mount.

"Is yer goin' ter town, mammy?" said George Washington, with a rueful glance in the direction of the waiting wagon.

His black face expressed better than words his heart's disappointment at the unexpected disarranging of his plans.

"Co'se I's gwine ter town! How's de butter gwine git dar ef I ain' fetch it? Huccome yer reckin hit's gwine walk dis day, stidder waiting fur me ter fetch it same's udder days? You's ter stay right in here wid de baby till I git back. Does yer hear? Ef de baby cries, gib her de biscuit on de she'f; and don' let her fall in de fiah. Does yer hear me? Why'n yer answer me, George Washin'ton?"

"Yessum," said the boy, "I hears yer;" and with a glance at the little black bundle squatted upon the floor, "Wash," as he was called on ordinary occasions, began to whimper.

Since the baby was born he had been its nurse; not a willing one always, but always a faithful one. To-day, for the first time, the rebellion took a tearful turn.

"Shet up, I tell yer, and ten' ter dat

chile. Po' little sister; ain' yer shame yerse'f?"

"Won't yer fetch me a stick of striped candy?" sobbed Wash, seeking to make the best of an unpleasant duty.

"I'll fetch a stick ter stripe yer back ef I hear anudder word fum yer; see ef I don't. Shet up, I tell yer."

If the rebellion was bitter, it was short-lived. Before the crazy little wagon had creaked out of sight Wash was squatted beside his sister, industriously stuffing her with the big biscuit that had been provided for her refreshment.

Aunt June, sailing into the county town in all the grandeur of her own turnout, soon forgot all about the children in the cabin at home. George Washington was to be relied upon, she knew, and so she gave herself no further uneasiness on the subject.

Aunt June always went to town in style. The big basket went along for style, too, for aunt June was not neglectful of her reputation, which was large among her acquaintance. The curious old bonnet bobbed many a mild "good morning," as the old mule jogged along the lanes or the white turnpike. As she neared the town, however, the bows became less cordial and a trifle — just a trifle — condescending. The reason was soon made known to the white mule.

" Dese trifling town niggers ! " she muttered. "Dey-all 'ud rather lay about town in rags, and go ha'f-starved, ez ter go ter de country, whar dey's plenty ter eat and drink, too. De lazy lot ob 'em ! Jest look at 'em,—eight erclock in de mawnin', and not a bressed thing ter do, — de day's work done ! "

Aunt June was a thrifty soul, as was uncle Jake, her " ole man." There were seven pounds of fresh, yellow butter in the tin pail at her feet, in exchange for which she would bring many a comfort to the cabin that she and Jake had bought with their own savings; the deed was safely registered in the clerk's office in town.

Aunt June scowled, grunted, and then sighed for the less fortunate ones of her race; but, as she said, the town negro had no love for the quiet country life that had been her prosperity.

The wagon had passed through the last toll-gate when aunt June spied an acquaintance among some workmen who were repairing a bridge over which her team must pass. She pulled up the mule and beckoned the man to her. He came promptly, and stood with his hand upon the mule's back while passing the compliments of the day.

"How you do, Mis' Pennin'ton?" said he. "I ain' see you in a long time."

"I's toler'ble," was the reply. "Yous-all well?"

"Toler'ble. Gwine ter town dis mawning, Mis' Pennin'ton?"

"Yes, sah. I hab some butter ter fetch in, and some groc'ries ter fetch out.

'Pears lack dey-alls at home keeps me toler'ble busy gwine in town fur groc'ries; but Jake and de chillen am hearty, and so am I; so we ought ter be thankful fur dat, I tell 'em."

"Yessum, dat you ought. Plenty hab got de health and de appetite what ain't got de groc'ries, I tell yer, Mis' Pennin'ton. Dat dey is."

"Dat am a fac'," said aunt June, giving the big basket a turn. "'Pears lack you-all's toler'ble busy ter-day."

"Yessum; we's trying ter finish dis here bridge ter-day, bekase we don't work ter-morrer. Hit's George Washin'ton's bufday."

Aunt June straightened herself with a jerk:

"What' dat you say? Hit's whose bufday?"

Instantly the negro assumed the grandeur of enlightener: "Hit am de bufday ob George Washin'ton; de —"

"What dat you saying?" demanded

aunt June, uncertain whether to take the man seriously and be angry, or whether to laugh at him for a joker.

The man grinned and patted the white mule's back. "Yessum, hit am George Washin'ton's bufday. He wuz —"

"Shet up! You reckin I don't know what he wuz? Yer think I ain't got a scrop o' sense. Tellin' me about George Washin'ton's bufday? I say it!"

"I heerd it ober in town," said the negro.

"Des listen at dat, will somebody?" cried aunt June. "What town got ter do wid George Washin'ton, I'd lack ter know? Talking 'bout de town saying hit 'uz George Washin'ton's bufday!"

The negro broke into a laugh. "Well," said he, "it am de sho' fac'. Dey say—"

"Shet yo' mouf. I don' want hear none yo' big talk. I wonder if yer takes me fur a fool, or a what? Letting on I don't know when's George Washin'ton's bufday! Hit ain' ter-morrer, I tell yer. Ter-morrer ain' no mo' his bufday dan it's mine. I reckin I ought ter know when George Washin'ton wuz bawn. I reckin I wuz dar, at de bawning."

The negro broke into a laugh so loud that his fellow workmen looked from their work to smile encouragingly, and wonder what had tickled him so. He stumbled back to them bent almost double, and holding his sides with both hands, laughing until the tears chased each other down his dark, furrowed cheeks.

To him it was a great joke. He supposed aunt June had merely disputed the question in order to prove herself not lacking in the general knowledge of the day. But when she stated, "as a clincher," he said afterward, that she "was there," the joke became so funny that he could not contain himself.

Aunt June gathered up her lines and clucked to the white mule. "Git up dar," she exclaimed. "You's gitting ez lazy ez one of dese here town niggers; dat you is."

The mule started off rather briskly, but not too briskly to let aunt June hear the parting shot from the bridge:

"Look out, folkses; look out. Dar goes de ol'est 'oman in de worl'. Look at her well. You ain' gwine nebber hab no sech chance ter see sech ol'es' 'oman ag'in in dis worl'. De ol'est 'oman eber' was, — *ef* de troof wuz all told."

Aunt June's anger had cooled somewhat when she reached the store at which she did her trading. The butter was weighed, and she began selecting supplies in exchange for it. If she was slow the merchant was patient, for aunt June's butter was of the best, and there was always a demand for it. There were forty cents to be traded out when the town clock in the court-house steeple struck twelve.

"Lor, marster," she declared, "I'm 'bleeged ter g'long back home. Hit am twelbe erclock and de chillen ain't got a bite ter eat. I'll be 'bleeged ter come back and finish ter-morrer."

"You'll have to get through to-day, aunt June," said the merchant. "The store will be closed to-morrow; it is George Washington's birthday."

Aunt June dropped the hank of yellow yarn she had been fingering for some minutes. "Marster," she exclaimed, "who tole you dat?"

"Who told me? Why, I don't know. Everybody knows that; it is in all the papers."

The black face wore a puzzled expression. "Yer don't sesso."

"Why, yes," said the merchant, smiling, "why shouldn't it be? We all love George Washington, aunt June."

"Yes, sah; yes, sah; sholy; ter — be sho'."

She finished her trading and went out to arrange her packages in the cart; she was puzzled; she didn't at all understand what it meant; yet there was a pleasant something about it, too.

"Dat chile sholy been and done something and not let on ter we-alls, his pappy and me," was her thought. Then in her honest old heart she felt a twinge of regret for her anger at the bridge; she wondered if the old negro could have been right after all.

"But naw," she mused, "hit couldn't 'a' been in de winter time he wuz bawn. I 'members hit wuz in de summer, bekase Jake wuz threshing wheat dat day. And dey wuz cabbage fur dinner, fur Liza Ann come ober and cooked it. Naw, sah, dey all am sholy wrong."

At that moment a gentleman to whom the woman and her cart were familiar, passing at the moment, called out pleasantly to her:

"Hello, aunt June! Must be going to celebrate George Washington's birthday from the number of your packages. Been buying yourself rich?"

There it was again, George Washington's birthday; she heard it everywhere. The very banks would be closed, she heard somebody say; and the post-office would be open but an hour all day. Clearly it was George Washington's birthday.

To be perfectly sure about it, however, she determined to step around to "Marse Tom's office," and ask about it. Marse Tom was once her husband's old master, and he would be pretty sure to tell her the truth.

"Marse Tom," said she, thrusting her head in a moment at the door, "what am de incasion ob all de incitement in de town ter-morrer?"

"It is George Washington's birthday, aunt June. Come in and get warm," said the master, without looking up from the paper he was busily preparing for the court that would convene the next week. But aunt June was gone; she went straight back to the grocery.

"Ef dey's all detarmint ter hab it so, I reckin it am got ter be so," she declared; and she bought back a pound of the butter she had sold, two pounds of cheese, and a dozen sticks of striped peppermint candy.

"Ef ev'ybody else ain' gwine to begrudge de chile de celebrating, I reckin sholy his own mammy ain' gwine do dat," she said. "I'se gwine straight home and kill a hin."

She felt relieved in crossing the bridge to find the workmen gone.

"I don' want hear no more of dat nigger's mouf," said she. "Lack ez not he'll be thinking I don' know de bufday ob my own chillen atter while."

She made several convenient stops on the way home, however, and at each stop explained why she was imposing so upon the mule.

"Dey's a lot of things in de cart, to be sho," said she. "But hit am George Washin'ton's bufday ter-morrer."

And for the life of her she couldn't help saying it just as the people in town had said it; as something that everybody ought to know. Whether these knew or not she was not able to divine, since the same reply met her at each repetition of the announcement: "Yessum; it am."

She was planning a great feast; she meant to make a cake and stuff it with raisins. "He ain' no onery nigger, dat boy ain't," said she, as the white mule plodded patiently homeward.

Little Wash couldn't understand his sudden rise to greatness, though he very cheerfully washed the potatoes, killed and picked the hen, and was told that he might beat the whites of the eggs for a cake the next day.

"A cake fur yo' bufday dinner, son," his mother told him.

That night when his father came home aunt June asked him if he couldn't get off from his work next day and eat dinner at home.

"Hit am George Washin'ton's bufday," she explained again in the town tone. "I done been getting de chile up a bit of nice victuals."

Uncle Jake scratched his head and pondered. "Ole 'oman," said he, after a pause, "you's mistookin', honey, 'bout dat. Ter-morrer ain' Wash's bufday. Wash 'uz bawned in de summer time. Don' yer reckerlict de threshing?"

"Yes, sah, dat I does. But de town folks dey all say ter-morrer 'uz George Washin'ton's bufday. Dey all wouldn't hab it no udder way. De very niggers on de pike say it 'uz George Washin'ton's bufday. And seeing dey wouldn't hab it no udder way, I jest stepped 'round ter Marse Tom's office and ax him. Kase I know ef Marse Tom say it so, it *am* so. So I put my head in de do' and says I: 'Marse Tom, what's ter do ter-morrer?' or something mighty lack dat. And says he: 'Hit am George Washin'ton's bufday.' Den I come 'long and kilt a hin;

kase I know it mus' be so den; aldo I reckerlick it *ain*' so."

Uncle Jake tilted his chair back and broke into a laugh. "Ole 'oman," said he, "you're all wrong 'bout dat. Dey wuz talking 'bout anuder George Washin'ton. I heered all 'bout dat long 'go. Dey wa'n' meaning we-alls' po' little Wash here."

Aunt June's eyes flashed for a minute; only a minute, however, and she ducked her head to laugh.

"I done kilt a hin," said she, "and it's got ter be et, naw, sah; George Washin'ton am gwine hab dat bufday. He been mighty handy he'ping 'bout de baby and all, and he kin hab two bufdays dis year well ez not. Dey ain' no sech gre't differ'nce 'twix the twenty-seckin o' Feb'ary an' de twenty-ninth of July, ez I kin see. Seed de reesuns, son, fur de cake; hit's fur yer bufday dinner termorrer."

A Parable of Four Talents

TEN o'clock, and the lamp still burned in the little back sitting-room of the Laurel Street bakery. That was a trifle irregular; for, unless something unusual was to pay, the sitting-room was always dark at ten o'clock. Something unusual was to pay; first, the hoarhound cough syrup simmering in Miss Marietta's bright stew-pan had not reached the proper thickness, and Miss Marietta had made up her mind to sit up with it "until it was done, if it took till midnight." For old Mrs. Rodgers was coughing herself to death while the syrup was dilly-dallying.

The waiting was not unpleasant; for

while Miss Marietta was not given to literature, she could not for the life of her make a light roll and a good book strike the same weight in the scale of her appreciation; she kept up with the leading magazines, too: the Laurel Street letter-carrier could have testified to that. "Because," she said, "it is so vulgar to fall behind, and so easy to keep up. Then, too, one feels much more respectable with a good magazine calling around every month. A regular visitor from the great folks, as it were, good company into which the poorest may enter for a very small consideration." So she took the magazines and read them, and laid them carefully away on the book-shelves where Mrs. Browning and Jean Ingelow smiled at her winter evenings in the friendliest, most feeling way. Not that they inspired to any literary ambition. Miss Marietta's season of ambition was ended long ago. With the life at the St. Cecilia Orphanage indeed, which life ended just five and twenty years before the night she sat in the back sitting-room of the Laurel Street bakery concocting a cough syrup for a beggar in the city hospital.

She had cherished some very gay hopes then, in the old days at the orphanage,— but she had left them there, in the consecrated old convent, along with her drawing-pencils, when she decided to learn the baker's trade. She had burned the bridges behind her as she went,— and the fires from the bake ovens had long ago drawn the fire from her ambition.

But she had kept up her magazine reading. That kept her abreast with the world in general, she said, and it kept her in sight, at least, of her own old world in particular. A very strange woman was Miss Marietta Brown,— a very strange, tender gentlewoman, despite the bakery and the bread and the odour of spiced pies.

It was due to the magazine reading, perhaps; possibly it was her nature, inherent. Perhaps it was the result of the fifteen years at St. Cecilia. It was due to St. Cecilia that she ever heard of a magazine, certainly; and it was due to the magazines that she ever heard of the book lying upon her knee, — whose contents had served to keep her awake, while she waited the thickening of the beggar's broth.

She had finished the book; "scanned it," she called it. She would *read* it for a full year to come.

She closed the lids and laid the volume upon her knee, and with her elbows resting upon the arms of her easy chair, and her sharp little chin dropped forward upon her thin locked fingers, her thoughts went trooping back, down the shadowy paths of memory, to the convent with its solemn, gray walls, half hidden by clinging old ivy. And within, the clean floors and stately galleries, and further on, up the broad old stairway, past the gloom and awe, to the old sunshiny garret, with its low, deep windows where she was wont to sit with her former friends (" friends in adversity" they called themselves then), Hannah, Kate, and Tom, and make plans, and dream dreams: such queer, wild dreams; dreams that had not been entirely barren of fulfilment for them, the other three, but which, for Miss Marietta, had been truly *dreams*.

The others had caught and held fast all the glory and glitter, if fame meant glory, for each was famous. She alone had fallen upon no special destiny.

To "feed the hungry" had been the sum total of her achievements. Tom, oh, how well she remembered Tom, and the songs he sang at the funerals of the dolls, and the burials of the dead doves and the pet rabbits; bits of opera caught here and there, snatches from the mass learned from the priests, or a strain or two from the Ave Maria the nuns had taught him.

He was now leading tenor in a famous

opera troupe; Tom, who had sung at the funerals of the dolls and rabbits! Miss Marietta had kept up with him through the press and the magazines. She was not surprised at the boy's advancement. His destiny had been foreordained and apparent since that day (the dear old Mother Columbia had told them about it) when a weary, heart-broken stranger had knocked at the convent door, and placed the motherless boy in the Mother's arms, saying only "In the name of the blessed Mother;" and then crept away to die. And the child had cried and cried, until gentle Sister Eulalie had taken him in her arms and coaxed him to sleep with the Ave, soft and low and tender.

He had grown up there among the nuns, fiery of temper and given to spells of melancholy, a child of moods and strange fancies, but with a love for music so deep, and a soul so responsive, that after awhile it absorbed all other feelings and interests until he was adopted by a lady, a childless woman, the wife of a musician. Now he was a leading tenor in a great company. Miss Marietta sighed. She had gone to hear him once, when the troupe visited Memphis, the city in which Miss Marietta and the bakery lived. Oh, yes, the bakery lived; it was a very live establishment indeed, the bakery in Laurel Street.

Miss Marietta had meant to invite him home with her to a tea-drinking in the sitting-room when the play was over. But when he danced down before the footlights, so young-looking and fine and handsome, bowing before the applause which greeted his appearance, it had been a trifle difficult to associate the famous "Bernardi" and the sentimental, fitful Tom of the old days in her mind as one and the same person. She had "slapped his cheek" many a time, then kissed away the sting of the blow before he had time to be angry. The little old maid had blushed as she thought of it. She felt so old, so worn and faded, when she looked at him, so young and fine, that she decided not to make herself known.

And the singer, if he noticed the little old figure in rusty brown, sobbing down in the parquet, had doubtless attributed her tears to the play, the tender, heart-breaking music, and had sung on. It was his business to make people weep.

But above the music with its wonderful thrills and pulsations, Miss Marietta had heard the chatter of childish voices. The footlights had disappeared, and the golden sunlight was streaming in the wide windows of memory; the doors of fancy flew back on golden hinges, and the Tom of the past pushed aside the Bernardi of the present. Instead of the grand opera in the great theatre, the Ave Maria was ringing through the St. Cecilia orchard where the dead doves were buried under the long dry grasses. She had wept, foolish little woman; she, alas, she had learned the agony of bringing the "Is" to sit in the seat of the "Might Have Been."

So she had returned alone to the bakery on Laurel Street, and he had gone on to new triumphs and nobler successes.

"Each to his own," she had said, as she turned the key in the lock after letting herself in at the bakery door.

"Each to his own," she had said again, when she had turned the yeast jars below the low fire. She had said it many times since, when his work and hers had recurred to her mind. And she said it again, "Each to his own," as she sat before the sitting-room fire, and, turning the leaves of the book she had been reading, saw through its gilded pages the green groves and the gray walls of the St. Cecilia orphanage come up to meet her.

For it was Kate's book. "A strong-minded work," the magazine reviewer had called it. Miss Marietta remembered that Kate had always been "strong-minded." Back in the days at the orphanage, when only a child, she had a way of making her plans, and living strictly up to them, refusing any offer, however advantageous, that meant a conflict with these plans. More than one good home had been offered Kate before she left St. Cecilia's, but she had begged so hard to stay that she had been allowed to do so, until one morning she left the orphanage the adopted daughter of a great physician.

The book lying upon Miss Marietta's knee, a scientific work upon the treatment of certain surgical operations, was the "direct result," so the little baker woman said, of that adoption. It was very like Kate, this work of her brain. It was the woman of the child that had been; the result of years of planning and dreaming and study; the flower of the inherent bud.

At the orphanage she had been known as Doctor Kate; Miss Marietta remembered that she had set the broken leg of a pet rabbit once, and that she had patched more than one lacerated arm, plastered cuts and doctored bruises among the children, stanched the blood and taken a stitch in a ghastly wound from which stern old Sister Mildred turned away sick and faint when the sufferers were carried to the infirmary.

"Send for Doctor Kate."

Miss Marietta laughed as she thought of little Kate Norton with her bottles and plasters and boxes, and glanced again at the title-page of the book upon her knee.

"Catharine Norton, M. D."

It had a very stately, solemn look; a later edition of the prim little Kate Norton of the old days at St. Cecilia's.

Surely Doctor Catherine had no more attentive reader than the little old maid who had broken brown bread into a bowl of milk, side by side with the miniature surgeon and author for some dozen years at the dear old orphanage.

She was still breaking bread, poor aimless little Miss Marietta, breaking it in a quiet, humble, but wholly generous way, for the hungry mouths of the city's poor. But Kate, — well, *she* had not lived "by bread alone," at all events.

"Catherine Norton, M. D."

Neither had "Bernardi, the star of the operatic stage."

And before the little bakery a square of gaudily painted tin told the Laurel Street folk that "M. Brown's Bakery" kept a fresh supply of "Rolls, Buns, and Loaves" constantly on hand.

Music, books, and bread. Each to his own.

She thought of a familiar stanza, become familiar through constant repetition, which she had found in one of her magazines:

"You may grind their souls in the self-same mill,
You may bind them brow to brow,
But the poet will follow the rainbow still,
While his brother will follow the plow."

Miss Marietta sighed and gave the stew-pan a gentle turn. "Yes," she said, "Tom and Kate have followed the rainbow, and have found the bag of gold."

"Each to his taste," she told herself, when in reality it was each to his need. Only, the others would not sacrifice talent to necessity, while she had taken the first offer made her, errand girl and apprentice to the old baker woman of Laurel Street. True, she had only meant it as a beginning, a living, until her brush and pencil should sweep away the obstacles in her way to independence. Alas for it! Beginnings are mere prophecies of the end, and false beginnings can not achieve great ends.

The hand of humanity is too weak, forsooth, to roll away the stone from the grave of mighty aspirations and possible achievements that have been strangled in the grasp of unwise beginnings. She had not been willing to trust her talent, lean upon it, believe in it, and, live or die, to cling to it. She did not know that great gifts belong to great souls, and will admit of no rivalries, no false or faltering allegiance in their possessor; they demand all, the soul entire.

"Catharine Norton, M. D." The words had a strong, honest look. Tom's name on the handbills had looked different. There was a picture of himself; the pretty, round head, with its short, clinging curls; how vain he had been of those dainty ringlets in the old orphanage days! And beneath the face, the beautiful, haunting face with its melancholy mouth, and eyes that seemed to be gazing into a kind of dream world, the "promised land" of the poets, was his name, "Bernardi," in Tom's own handwriting.

Miss Marietta smiled as she recalled the picture. It was so like Tom, that half melancholy. The same expression had been borne upon the face of the boy Tom, and he had been rather vain of it, in the days of obscure boyhood. It made him interesting, he said in the days of obscurity. It made him no less so in the days of his success. He was known as the "Sad-eyed singer, Bernardi."

At the orphan asylum, he had been simply "sentimental Tom." Still, Miss Marietta remembered there were seasons of gloom, melancholy, when he would steal off and spend hours and hours alone down under the apricot-tree in the asylum orchard. And when she would find him there, with his face buried in the long brown orchard grass, and try to comfort him, he would cry out:

"Etta, oh, Etta, it is unbearable."

She would crouch down in the grass beside him, and sob with him, poor tender little heart, until Hannah, beautiful, brown-eyed Hannah, as much a nun by nature as Tom was an artist, Kate a surgeon, and she a baker, came with a touch of her gentle hand, the sound of her sweet voice that could bring the light back to Tom's face, the song to his lips, as nothing else could.

She would kneel down beside him in

the grass and talk about the "blessed Mother" in her trustful, devout way, until Tom's melancholy was gone. And after awhile they would go home to the convent, hand in hand, through the orchard grasses, the sunset trailing a crimson path behind them, while she, little Marietta, sat under the shade of the apricot-trees, trying to glean comfort from the song they were singing:

"Hear the heart's lonely sigh,
Thine, too, hath bled."

Sitting before the fire in the back room of Laurel Street bakery, the old feeling of desolation came back, the

"*Ora pro nobis*"

trembled upon her lips as it did that faraway afternoon when she knew that Tom loved Hannah. But he had been true to his talent, his ambition. For when he began to love he fled. Left the convent. Away from that which threatened his ambition.

But Etta had fled first: fled to the baker woman, and the odour of spiced pies. The sticky pastes, the jams and jellies, the hot ovens and the white flour, were infinitely more bearable than Tom's love for Hannah. So she had proved false to her gift; the abandoned brushes left beside the garret window, the unfinished head of a saintly Madonna, testified the shameful desertion. She had been unwilling to suffer for her talent's sake, while *he* had turned his back upon joy, and rushed with determined soul into the very arms of desolation, in order to render the altar of his worship free of other gods.

And Hannah, devout, wholly unconscious of the anguish she had caused, more than once solemnly shook her pretty head and refused the love offered her in costly homes that still lacked wealth enough to buy the little maiden's loyalty.

"A nun inherent," Miss Marietta had said the night she had gone back to St.

Cecilia's to see the gloriously golden tresses sweeping the altar where Hannah knelt in bridal robes ready to become "the bride of the Church."

Sweet Sister Magdalene in serge and cap was born that night, and where the beautiful girl Hannah went in, the pale nun came forth.

Forth into the world to minister, not dreaming of fame and not caring for it. Yet it had come to her; a reward perhaps for loyalty, who shall say? For when the loathsome fever plague struck the Southern cities, and those who could flee fled, leaving the stricken to drag themselves into their lonely beds and die there, a beautiful nun with the name of the blessed Mary upon her lips, and the love of humanity in her heart, had hastened down to smooth the pillows, cool the lips of the stricken, and gently speed the souls of the dying.

It was a grand thing to do, a grandly heroic thing, and very like indeed to the little orphan Hannah was the brave deed of the Sister Magdalene.

All the world heard of it. The world beyond Laurel Street never heard of the "Brown Bakery," though it had been a thriving business for five and twenty years.

All the world heard of Hannah, for wherever the demon of disease planted his banner, there she followed with the rosary and crucifix. She was a nun inherent, and had been true to her heritage, as had Tom and Kate.

Miss Marietta wondered where they were, as she sat there dreaming over Kate's book. She did not wish for them, no, no; she had no wish to ever meet the old asylum mates familiarly again, unless it might be Hannah. Hannah would understand, she thought. Tom would feel sorry; oh, how that would hurt her! And Kate would run her eyes along the shelves and counters with their brown loaves and egg-polished buns, and say nothing, except in look. That look would say, "You always were wanting in ambition, Etta."

The very loaves themselves, and the greasy doughnuts, would appeal to Tom. Miss Etta could almost hear him cry out, in the old heart-hurt way of the asylum days, "Oh, Etta, it is unbearable!" But Hannah would see deeper than the achievement; Hannah would catch a glimpse of the endeavour suddenly choked, the ambition strangled. And she would say something good, and strong, and tender; that would be very like Hannah. Miss Marietta bottled her syrup, and glanced at the clock on the mantel.

"Too late to carry it over to-night," she said, but she set the alarm an hour earlier than she was accustomed to rising, so that she might have time to run over and carry the medicine before the hour for opening her shop.

She might have sent her errand girl, to be sure, but she had been an errand girl herself, and the day old Victory Marble, the baker mistress under whom she served, died and went to her reward, and she had stepped into her shoes, Miss Marietta had vowed a vow, the only one perhaps she had ever made. She would make no pack-mules of heavy-hearted errand girls. Such was the vow made in memory of her own over-burdened youth.

So the syrup was set aside for her own carrying, and Miss Marietta gave the yeast a turn before the smouldering fire, saw that the pie boards were carefully covered, and, taking her lamp, climbed the stairs to her bedroom in the upper story.

But Doctor Catharine's book had set her thoughts awrangle; she could not sleep. She got up and stood for a moment at the window. The curtains were drawn back and the shutters wide open, for Miss Marietta was fond of sleeping where the moonlight could find her pillow. She had learned that at the convent, where the windows had neither shades nor shutters.

The bakery window looked down upon a tangle of rustling brown hop-vines, and looked up at the star-spangled heavens. She, too, had looked upon hops, fed upon husks. They, Tom, Hannah, and Kate, had studied the stars.

It was the old, old story of fortune's ups and downs, she thought. Yet her education had not justified such meagre results, although it had been unfinished when she went to old Victory Marble. It was strange, the destinies that had followed the four orphans of St. Cecilia's. But, indeed, it was a problem with a very plain meaning. They had been true, those other three, to their talent, their genius; had believed in, and relied upon it. And genius had rewarded faith. Miss Marietta tiptoed to watch a light burning in an upper story of a tall building farther down the street. The building was the hospital where ebbed and flowed the pauper life of this great city. Miss Marietta knew what the light in the upper story meant.

"Little Joe is worse," she said. "I must send him a nice roll in the morning."

Bread, bread, bread. The old familiar text came to her: "Man shall not live by bread alone."

She turned away from the window and the staring white moonlight, and crept back to bed.

The basket that went to hospital next morning contained a book of rare engravings hidden away under the snowy rolls.

"Joe has a taste for drawings," Miss Marietta said aloud when she placed it there; in her heart she said: "'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

There was silence in the city, the silence of sorrow and desertion. The mild winter, for which the poor had kissed their crosses and thanked the blessed Mother, had proved traitor, and had brought in its wake that disease and death whose germ must needs have frost and ice to check its deadliness.

The brown earth cracked and crumbled; and down in the lower levels outside the city's limits, the sluggish pools were covered with a greenish scum, through which the hot breezes struck, only to flaunt forth from the loathsome stagnancy, the leprous breath of fever.

The yellow scourge spread like a vapour through the parched city, causing a wail among the huddled masses of humanity. And as the tell-tale signal rose here and there, among the house tops, floating its demoniac greeting to some other signal, the frightened people gathered their children in their arms, or left them to perish, and fled; fled anywhere and everywhere, their only thought being to escape the awful fever-death.

Down in Laurel Street the little baker woman toiled on over the hot ovens; the fires were not extinguished day or night, the ovens were never cool; the sieve never rested, and the tidy floors wore still the dusty prints of feet along with the white dust of flour. Yet the shelves were empty, and the cases held neither bun nor loaf. And for all the hurried and unnecessary labour, not a penny had dropped into the baker woman's till, four full weeks.

She had not thought of that; at such times as these men do not stop to cast up gain or loss. When death is on his steps, Dives remembers Lazarus.

Miss Marietta toiled on. Bread! bread! bread! it seemed as if the world was starving. Every day the bakery sent the brown loaves out to find the poor who could not fly, and must not perish.

And while she baked they blessed her, and kissed their crosses, praying the Virgin's care upon her.

But there came a day when the loaves were missing: down in Laurel Street another door was closed. The store was strangely desolate looking, stripped of its wheaten adornment. The ovens in the bake-room were cold, the flour waited unkneaded in the tray where she had placed it when the message came. The blinds were closed and the curtain drawn fast. The errand girl had opened them at daybreak to put out the fever-flag, and then closed them again, mutely wondering who would do the same for her the next morn, or the next, when she should lie in Miss Marietta's place, waiting for death.

It had come so sharp and sudden, the message, and Miss Marietta had received it so calmly; she had been baking, too busy to think of the scourge, and late in the afternoon had gone to the door to fetch a tray of warm loaves to a volunteer hospital nurse waiting there for them.

"No abatement?" the girl had heard her ask the man.

"No, ma'm, it grows worse and worse. Two of our doctors died last night, and four sisters of charity this morning; and there is not a soul to say mass for the dead nuns; for the priest died just ten minutes after."

Miss Marietta did not speak until the big "band wagon," that was rattling by, had passed on. The gaudy festival carriage bore in gilded letters upon its crimson sides, "To the races." Within, it bore the dead; a score of rude pine boxes; a full score. Death on the race track had distanced all rivals. When the wagon had passed by, Miss Marietta spoke:

"Where are the bodies of the nuns and the priest?"

The man pointed to a coal cart that was following in the direction the band wagon had gone.

"That was all we could get, ma'm," he said. "And that is driven by a young society chap, ma'm. One of the nuns nursed him through the fever, and the priest buried his mother three days ago.

It takes a plague like this, ma'm, to break a path to men's hearts."

The nurse steadied the tray upon his head, and said, "Good evening," but he turned back a moment to say:

"Little Joe died last night." Miss Marietta gasped for breath. "Yes'm, he had a lot of pictures, and a book he begged to have put in the coffin with him; he was certain he would die from the first. But bless you, the box they brought for him was so narrow we had to lay him on his side. I did slip in a Madonna's face; slipped it in the child's jacket. I thought it looked a trifle like my mother when I picked it up. She died with the fever nearly a month back."

The nurse went on to his work, and Miss Marietta went into the shop. She went back to the tray in the kitchen, and sifted the flour for the next baking. Then she laid the sieve aside and called to the errand girl.

"Order the fires put out," she said,

"and pay off the hands." Then she crept up-stairs and into her bed. The errand girl bent over her.

"Hannah! Oh, if Hannah would come!"

In an hour her eyes were sunk and staring, and her skin like yellow parchment. The furrowed hands clutched at the white covers of the bed whenever the terrible agony struck her. Then, when the pain had passed for a moment, she would drop among the pillows and moan:

"Hannah, oh, Hannah!"

The errand girl thought the angels must have told her, and crossed herself when the door opened, and the tall, strong figure of a nun entered, and a voice whose very tone was music said:

"Etta! Etta! Hannah has come."

The nun threw off her veil and bent over the sunken yellow face on the pillow.

Death stood back a moment as the dying woman's eye caught the face bent over her; and then a cry went up from that poor place, a cry of such joy, such infinite rapture as the old shop had never heard.

"Hannah! oh, Hannah!"

The strong arms and the weak ones met in one fond embrace. Sisters, indeed, in charity. That charity which is greater than hope, and mightier than faith. But death is mightier than either, and death was there. The clock upon the mantel in the sitting-room below had ceased to run, for no one thought to wind it; but from a convent in the next street the angelus sounded when Miss Marietta opened her eyes.

"Oh, Sister, the ring-doves are all dead, and the rabbits are too old to play, and I have buried my goldfinch under the apricot-tree down in the orchard."

The nun drew the slight figure into her arms, and rested her soft chin on the yellow temple. She, too, was travelling again the old paths through the convent garden. The path down which four orphans had travelled into such widely different destinies.

There were the rabbits, and the dead ring-doves, and sweet Sister Xavier trying to comfort the troubled hearts of the tiny mourners. And then they were carrying Etta's pretty goldfinch to bury it. It was Etta herself who was drawing the nun back through the old paths of childhood. It was Etta who threw off the circling arms and sobbed:

"Sing, Tom! sing the Ave."

The nun stood up and folded her hands upon her bosom.

"Ave sanctissima!
We lift our souls to thee."

The hymn rose and fell, soft and sweet and trustful. And when the last note died away in her beautiful throat, she beckoned to the errand girl, telling her beads in the corner.

"Can you make out to shroud her while I try to find a priest?"

"Yes, Sister."

For the plow had reached the end of the furrow; the rainbow still spanned the heavens.

The rainbow still spanned the heavens; and they, those other three, still followed in the seven-coloured glow, until one day in the summer one foot slipped the radiant path, and Hannah went out with the multitudes whose cause had been her calling.

In the nun's graveyard, under the shadow of the convent walls, sleeps the beautiful dust of the Sister Magdalene. The simple headstone tells only that she waits there the final resurrection of the saints. But over to the westward, where the city is crossed by the great passways, one leading to the city, the others to the river, just where the priests seeking the Cathedral in the city's heart, the labourer hurrying down to the flat, or to the cotton fields beyond the river, can see and remember, a statue, an angel, in bronze, with wings outspread, as if hastening on its mission of love, commemorates the work of Hannah.

The marble pedestal says, "Sister Magdalene." So her work ended with her life. She had been true to her calling, her talent, which is sometimes called by the broader name of genius, but which, after all, means only that special One Thing, which is bestowed on each and all, and which, seized and nurtured and believed in, brings its own reward; and which, however humble, if cast aside for an alien, or buried in a napkin, throws back on its repudiator tears, desolation, regret.

In an old churchyard, just without the city of Florence, a great unglossed pillar, a pillar of stones, rises upon the green banks of the Arno. It records no name, inasmuch as it arose there stone by stone, brought thither by the lovers of "Bernardi." The days are never too hot, the wind never strikes too chill for the pilgrim visiting the tomb to carry his stone, which helps to build the monument to the sad-eyed singer whose voice once stirred all Florence, and whose memory still lives through all Europe. He had not been happy. What of that? Ambition and happiness are unacquainted. He had been true; true to his talent, his genius.

Happiness is not mentioned in the bestowal of talents. That comes with the end, the reckoning; he had done his best, thrown aside every weight in making his race for the rainbow. He had found the bag of gold in the unglossed monument where the chase ended on the green banks of the Arno.

Far away in the North, a woman, strong bodied and with lips that told of purpose, a woman who had flung the world her scorn of its opinions, folded the paper she had been reading while she sipped her coffee.

She had read news in the morning journal, — news that would have affected most women; but there was no tremor of the firm lips, and the hand that removed the gold-bowed glasses from the cold eyes were the same steady hands of the surgeon, Catharine Norton, M. D.

"So he is dead," she said. "Well, he succeeded; that is worth dying for."

She returned to her books and her laboratory; she had her work, it absorbed her, demanded every feeling of her soul. She had no sentiment to waste upon dead singers. Yet she approved him; he had striven, clung to his talent, and it had repaid him.

And so indeed did hers; for when she died her bones were sent to rest in marble, and her life was gathered on gilded pages which the world still reads and applauds.

She had lived her life solitary and alone, but it *was* her life. She had been created for that; she recognised it, accepted it, and had done her best with it. Her talent had doubled itself. She had fed no poor, comforted and sustained none; that was not her work, and "no man can serve two masters." She had attended to her own talent, seeing that it accomplished that for which it was given.

And so indeed had he, Bernardi, and she, the nun Hannah. And for her, the little human-hearted baker woman, she had toiled and given and wept; fed the hungry and clothed the naked. But, plowing in other men's fields, she had lost the world an artist.

Sweet 'Laases

IT was twilight in Mullein Town. Down the dusty street, of which Mullein Town boasted but one, sounded the uneven, loitering step of the labourers going home from their work over in the city "on the other side the creek."

It was only a village, a little settlement of negroes, that was interesting, if not large; select, too, and original, bound by no strict obedience to the laws that governed their more pretentious friends over in the city "on the other side the creek."

The other side the creek meant much to the denizens of Mullein Town. They cautioned their children against "soshatin' with any sech triflin' niggers as dey-all on tudder side de creek."

On the other hand, the Mullein Town tribes were "a passel o' cunjure niggers what don't know butter fum beeswax. Dey ain't nothin' fitten ter talk 'bout in dat Mullein Town. Better keep 'way fum dar ef you don't want a spell flung ober you; dat you had. Ef you don't want ter wake up some day wid all de ha'r gone out yer haid, or else yer feet done furgit how ter walk, you better stay on dis side de creek."

So was there great enmity between the two sections. Mullein Town boasted no house of worship, and although she was in consequence forced to cross the creek and worship with the "other side," even then the enmity was not forgotten.

She was welcome to come over and sit under the sanctuary, to catch such crumbs of comfort as might fall from the tables of her pretentious neighbours, and she might drop her mite into the same basket along with theirs; they would send it along in the same message to the same suffering heathen; she might shout and sing and shake hands with the saints from the "other side" *on religious occasions*, but the line must be drawn somewhere, and it was drawn at church festivals, suppers, concerts, and the like. She must keep on her own side the creek when it came to carrying off the honours at these entertainments. Let her presume to carry off a prize, and see what would happen.

Mullein Town knew what would happen; for had not yellow 'Liza, the belle of the "'cross the creek" town, carried off the last three cakes at the last three walkings? And she would do it again; they could depend on 'Liza to uphold their pride and to outdo the "stuck-up niggers on de udder side de creek."

'Liza was busy packing the fresh, clean clothes into the basket; she was in a great hurry, — as great a hurry as a Mullein Town negro could get in. She had to carry those clothes home across the creek; for 'Liza did such washing as the fine folks on the other side were fain to recognise and glad to get.

She was singing as she worked; one of those dreamy, drawly, half-hymn, half-jubilee melodies, that nobody composed and nobody but a Mullein Town negro, a woman at that, knows how to sing:

"Oh, mo'ner, le's go home.
Bless God!
He's a-wait'n ober yander fur ter see you come,
Bless God! Bless God!
Oh, rise up, sinner, an' shake off yer sin
Ef yer s'pec' de anguls ter let you in,
Bless God!

"Bless God! Bless God!
Salvation's free ter you an' me,
Bless God! Salvation's free."

She sang in a low, crooning way that was not unmusical despite the uneven measure of the words, which she twisted into a sing-song melody of her own, adding a note where the words were too many, and dropping into a long, soughing, moan-like sound that effectually covered up any lack where words were wanting. For metre is a small thing to the negro; he thinks of the music, not of the metre. The more wise he.

Through the open door of her cabin came the prattle of children playing about the streets, varied now and then with the loud laugh, or the friendly "How-you-do's" of villagers passing to or from their homes, to the workmen coming out from their work over in the town across the creek.

Over all sounded the almost ceaseless creaking of the well-sweep; for all Mullein Town watered at the public well. Moreover, it was supper-time in Mullein Town, and it was a natural thing that the pails should stand empty about the curbing while Mullein Town exchanged the gossip of the day in the dusky, dusty twilight.

They were talking about the cake-walking that was to be that very night at the church across the creek. Every word came as distinct and as sure to the ear of the young woman packing her laundry basket as though the talk had been designed solely for her ears.

"Jes' wait till 'Liza tackles 'em, I tell yer. Eh-eh? Dey ain't seen dat gal strack a plank yit. Dey all better not go ter brayin' till dey's cl'ar o' de stable, *I* tell you. 'Liza'll fetch 'em."

It was a man's voice that replied:

"Dey say dey got a new gal ober dar what dey fotch fum somers 'way off. Dey say she kin sho' walk. Dey say she strack a walk once ober dar whar she come fum, dat dey ain' nebber stop talkin' 'bout yit. Dey say she kin beat our 'Liza all ter pieces; dat's what de town niggers say."

"Yes, an' dey say dat de las' time. Dey say dey got a nigger what skeer a jack rabbit hitse'f off'n de track. But it ain' skeer 'Liza Ann, ez nobody ebber heeard tell on. 'Liza walked home wid de angul cake on her haid jus' de same; onconsarned as if hit 'uz a basket o' clean clothes she 'uz fetchin' home fum washin'. Eh-eh? Fotch anudder jack rabbit fur 'Liza ter beat, is dey? All right, 'Liza'll beat him; we-all ain't skeered 'bout 'Liza."

Their praise was pleasant. 'Liza smiled as she folded a pair of dainty fluted pillowcases and laid them upon the white heap in the over-full basket. Get the cake? She hadn't a doubt of it; no more than her friends and neighbours outside at the well.

She meant to hurry home and get her cabin in order before going to the "walking," for she would be pretty sure to have company after the entertainment; she always had after similar entertainments. Tall Rufus, the Mullein Town beau, who had a barber's shop "across the creek," always walked home with her after a cakewalking, and they always had a cosy hour together, enjoying the spoils that 'Liza Ann brought home from the battle.

When 'Liza stepped outside with the

basket carefully balanced upon her head, the streets were almost deserted. The odour of frying ham told how the late gossips were employed. 'Liza was late, the ham reminded her.

"Eh-eh? dis nigger got ter move ef she gits ter de cake-walkin' *dis* night," said she as she turned the key of the cabin door and, slipping it into her bosom, started off in a brisk little walk down the dusky, moonlighted road.

A few straggling stars were shining, and through the locust-trees a silver disk hung low in the heavens,—the new moon. 'Liza Ann had walked but a short distance when she gave her head a sudden little twist (she was thinking of the girl over in the town who expected to outstrip her in the contest for the cake that night) and saw the silver bow, suspended like a thing of evil, straight through the full branching limbs of the locust-trees.

Unconsciously she gave a little startled scream.

"I saw it through de trees," said she. "Oh, my Lord! I saw de new moon through de trees. Dar's gwine ter be bad luck."

She was not thinking of the cake, however, nor of the "bad luck" that might come to her through failure to win it. She was thinking of that man who always walked home with her after the walking and helped her to eat it. What if he should fail to come?

She was relieved, however, of the fear before she had walked a hundred yards. Down the road, in the half light of the dying day, a quick step was hastening towards her. In an instant she was the coquette, pretending not to see him.

Nearer and nearer he came. 'Liza was humming a hymn under her breath, and heard, seemingly, nothing.

"How's my Sweet 'Laases dis evenin'?"

When he spoke she gave a startled little scream and clutched the clothes basket, that tottered upon her saucy head as naturally as though it had been trained to the pretty deception. And indeed it might have been, for the number of times it had helped 'Liza Ann to play that same part she was playing this evening.

"Did I skeer my Sweet 'Laases?"

'Liza Ann dropped her head as much as the big basket would permit, and laughed coyly. Her beau fell into step and walked back with her a little distance to the bridge that spanned the dividing creek. As they walked they talked, in the low, coquettish way of lovers from the rural ranks.

"My Sweet 'Laases goin' to de cake-walkin' *dis* night?"

"Uh-huh."

"Her goin' ter win de cake ober de town gal fum furrin parts?"

"*Dat she am!*"

"Eh-eh; hear dat; dat's de way talk it ter 'em? My Sweet 'Laases goin' let a cullud man 'scort her home 'longside o' dat cake?"

"Uh-huh."

"Same's ef he's fitten ter soshate wid prize walkers en fine ladies?"

"I 'spec'."

"You's a lady; *dat's* what you am; a lady fum 'way back. I 'spec' I gwine kiss dem ruby lips when we's done wid de cake?"

"Uh-huh; I 'spec'. Ef dat 'ar' town gal fum de furrin parts don't beat me walkin'."

"Listen at dat now: beat *you?* Who gwine beat you? Ef she do dat she got git up 'fo' day; 'way long yon'er 'fo' day too, I tell *you*. Beat you nothin'. Dey ain' no furrin gal gwine beat my Sweet 'Laases, *I* tell you; else she ain' gwine be my Sweet 'Laases no mo'."

The flattery was sweet, sweeter than the cake itself. 'Liza Ann lent a willing ear. She even opened the road for more.

"I got some raid shoes ter w'ar," said

she. "Some generwine ones. I'm gwine ter git 'em dis minute. Miss Mamie what I washes fur done say she'd sell 'em ter me fur de week's washin'. I's gwine walk in 'em ter-night."

"Uh-huh. Lan' o' Canaan! won't we be fine? A cake an' a pair o' raid shoes. Dat furrin gal won't be in dis pleasurin', I tell you. What else you got, hon?"

'Liza Ann drew a trifle nearer. The clothes basket was a great nuisance this evening.

"I got a little chick'n ter brile, an' a pan o' hot biscuits, an' a couple o' col' dumplin's."

"An' de cake, hon; you sholy ain't gwine furgit de cake?"

"Naw, I ain't furgit de cake," said she. "Hit's a mighty nice one, I reckin; hit's a angul cake."

"De anguls gwine be dar ter eat it, too, ain't dey, hon, when de walkin's ober?"

"I sholy 'spec' so," she replied with a

laugh. "Lor', I cl'ar furgot, but" (strange she should have thought of it at that moment), "I see de new moon through de trees ter-night."

"De moon ain't got de gibbin' ob de cake, hon," said Rufe. "Don't you min' de moon, but jest keep a eye on yer feetses. I got to leab my Sweet 'Laases here an' git 'long back ter de shop ef I 'spec' ter see dem raid shoes walk inter de kingdom *dis* night. But I'll see you at de cake-walkin', an' den I'll walk home wid de angul cake an' de angul too."

They separated with a laugh and a promise of meeting again, and each went his own way, she happy in the certainty of success and of that other certainty of youth, — love.

He was thinking of the angel cake over which he was to preside when it should come into the actual rather than the prospective ownership of his lady-love. He was well acquainted with those angel cakes;

he had partaken of more than one of them with 'Liza in the cabin over in Mullein Town.

'Liza meanwhile hurried on with the basket of laundry. Besides making her own toilet, she wanted to spread her table and tidy up the cabin before going to the cake-walking.

The lamps were lighted when she climbed the steps of the house that held the coveted scarlet footwear. The mistress herself counted out the pieces of fluted lace and lawn as 'Liza lifted them from the basket. When the last had been counted she took out her pocketbook, and offered the girl the two bright silver dollars that were due her. 'Liza stopped her with a gesture.

"Now, Miss Mamie," said she, "you promise I might hab de raid shoes fur dis week's washin'."

The mistress hesitated.

"'Liza, you surely are not in earnest about wanting those slippers," said she.

"They pinch my own feet, still less—What size do you wear, 'Liza?"

"I mostly w'ars a fo', but I's gwine w'ar a two *dis* night," said 'Liza.

"Why, they'll pinch you to death; you won't be able to walk a step in them."

"Eh-eh! don't you b'leeve a word o' dat, Miss Mamie. I'll git 'em on. Ez fur de pinchin', hit's wuf a pinch ter git de cake ober dat furrin yaller gal. 'Sides, Miss Mamie, I's 'bleeged ter hab dat cake, becase I done axed comp'ny ter he'p me eat it."

She dropped her head forward upon her breast and laughed; the mistress herself could but smile at the audacity of the proceeding.

"But what if you fail to get the prize?" said she.

Such an idea had never entered the girl's head.

"Eh-eh!" said she. "I's 'bleeged ter git it. He done say I ain't his Sweet 'Laases no mo' ef I ain't win dat 'ar' cake."

The mistress dropped into a chair and laughed aloud.

"His what?"

"His Sweet 'Laases; dat's what he calls me, Miss Mamie; he say I's his Sweet 'Laases becase I takes all de cakes fum de udder gals. Gimme de shoes, Miss Mamie. I got ter run 'long an' set de table 'ginst I go ter de chu'ch."

As she opened a drawer of the bureau, the mistress said:

"You're a great goose to do it, 'Liza; but if you will have them — "

"Yessum," said 'Liza, "I 'spec' I am; but we's all gre't gooses sometimes, Miss Mamie, when we's somebody's Sweet 'Laases."

"Well — yes; perhaps so. Here are the slippers: you'd better keep your hard earned money, though, Eliza."

But 'Liza was gone, back to the cabin in Mullein Town, with her treasure in her hand. As she thrust her key into the lock and pushed open the cabin door it occurred to her that she was tired. It had been a busy day, and she had stood at the ironing-table well-nigh the whole of it. And she had walked over with the clothes, and made a little visit to old aunt Nancy, who was down with the rheumatism, in a cabin at the further end of the village; then she had carried home the flat-iron she had borrowed at another house, and had "stepped" over to uncle Jeb Moon's to borrow two nails and a hammer with which to do a little needed carpentry about the place.

Yes, she was tired. The low, shuck-bottomed chair before the hearth had a tempting something about it; for one moment the glories of the cake-walking dimmed before the demands of exhausted nature. Only for a moment, however; for as she drew off the paper wrapper, and the bright red, high-heeled slippers lay in her hand, weary nature was relegated to a back seat.

There were long brilliantly red ribbons

attached to each; a tie-string that was calculated to heal the most rebellious case of weariness on record. 'Liza Ann was herself again in half a minute. She placed the shoes upon the mantel where she could see them while she tidied the room. They had the appearance of a gaudily plumaged bird perched above the little mantel among the white papers, neatly scalloped, which served as lambrequin, and the glass tumblers filled with gaily coloured tapers that were kept ready for the hero of "Sweet 'Laases."

She swept and dusted the room, spread a white sheet over the bed, and drew a pair of shams, embroidered in turkey red, over the pillows, shook out the white muslin window curtains, and then she "set the table."

A clean, fresh cloth, two plates, a couple of cups and saucers, knives and forks, and two small white napkins. A pitcher of red chrysanthemums occupied one corner of the board, while the broiled chicken in a glass-covered dish filled another. The biscuit and other knick-knacks were arranged with systematic nicety about the board. In the centre of the table there was a tall glass cake-stand, set in a fluff of red and white fringed papers. The stand was empty, reserved for the cake that was to be won that night.

When all had been made ready, 'Liza made her toilette; a neat figure and trim enough in a modest dress of dark gray stuff with a fresh white apron and linen collar. She finished off her costume, however, with a flaming scarlet bow hoisted upon her short, kinky hair, immediately above her forehead. Then came the slippers, and then too came the tug of war. They refused to go on; twist and turn, pull and persuade as she might, the number two refused the foot of the number four. The poor feet were weary and swollen with their day's tramping, and the shoes were small.

'Liza was in despair.

"You's *got* ter go on," she declared to the offending reds; "you's got ter go, and you'd as well ter do it."

There was another pull and twist, and then 'Liza Ann took heart.

"Dey come mighty nigh it dat time," she declared, triumphantly. "Dey didn't lack more'n a inch dat time; ef my feet wuzn't swelled dey'd go on, I mos' knows."

She got up and filled the kettle and swung it over the fire that had served to heat the irons all day, and while the water was heating she ate a bite of cold victuals and finished her preparations for the frolic. Then she filled a tub with the hot water and, lifting her skirts, placed her feet in the steaming vessel. She soaked them for ten minutes, then drew on her shoes and stockings, and slipping the red shoes under her shawl, she started for the cake-walking.

"Dey'll go on now," she told herself, "becase dey's got ter go; but I reckin I'll jest fetch 'em along in my han' an' put 'em on at de do'."

She was late, but as all Mullein Town was late, her tardiness created no special comment. She was tired too; she couldn't forget it either; even in the gay scene about her the ironing-board and the tedious tramping she had done would obtrude like "spots upon the feast" of her pleasure.

She had many friends among the assembled revellers, and she had many enemies. Varied and many were the salutations which greeted her arrival at the church.

"Dar's 'Liza Ann; now look out fur yer cake," was the first challenge from the Mullein Town side, responded to with prompt disregard of feeling from the opposing candidate's friends.

"Eh-eh! raid shoes. 'Spec' ter carry off de cake, does yer? 'Spec' dem raid shoes ter p'intedly walk off wid it, eh-eh?"

The slippers did create a sensation and no mistake. 'Liza Ann felt repaid for the pain they were giving her, though she had some fears concerning the ominous cracking of threads in the neighbourhood of the heel. They represented just one week's work, though that was a small matter as compared with the winning of the cake.

She laughed and flirted and was happy in hearing herself called "Sweet 'Laases" now and then as the tall figure of Rufus the barber bent over the scarlet bow upon her head.

There were a full dozen who had entered the lists, but only 'Liza and the champion from a neighbouring town were the favourites.

'Liza scanned the contestants as they took their places along the row of benches reserved for them. At the very end of the bench, arrayed in regal purple, and with a white feather drawn majestically across her head and fastened above her ear with a brooch of flaring brightness, 'Liza Ann beheld her rival.

Her costume created a stir; 'Liza trembled for her own modest gray. A glance at the red slippers, however, reassured her; the red slippers and the barber who was waiting for a slice of that same cake resting at that moment in full view of the assembled multitude, upon a tall glass stand in the centre of a table at the end of the room. It was an angel cake; only the angel cakes were deemed worthy of admission to a contest of this kind.

Promptly at the hour appointed the master of ceremonies called the assembly to order.

"Bredderin," said he, "an' sisters, we will open de exercises ob de ebenin' wid prayer; let us all pray."

The prayer was as earnest as though he had been conducting a protracted meeting, and the amens were as hearty. When it ended they sang a hymn, and then they cleared the space down the centre of the room, and the cake-walking was *on*.

But little attention was given to the first ten contestants; interest was centred upon the two rival walkers, who had made a record at similar contests.

'Liza Ann was the last upon the list. When she saw her rival rise and shake out her purple skirts amid a murmur of "um's" and of "eh-eh's," it required more than one lingering glance at her scarlet-shod feet to keep down her fears. Still her faith in her adornment was sufficient. Moreover, she knew the weaknesses of her kind.

"A nigger'll vote fur raid shoes whether dey's got any feet in 'em or not," she told herself, when the murmur for her rival broke out into actual applause. She even smiled as the yellow girl from afar took her place at the end of the room and, setting her foot upon the plank that had been chalked for the purpose, waited the command to start.

It came from the master of ceremonies stationed at the opposite end of the room.

"Raidy, — start!"

The girl lifted her head with a proudly conscious little toss, and held it erect, motionless, until she had caught the gaze of every eye in the room. Nobody thought of the broad flat foot walking down the middle of the floor; nobody thought of the walk itself; they were all too intent upon the bright, piquant face under the droop of the white ostrich feather, to notice that the girl had made her feet thoroughly comfortable in a pair of loose, unpretentious old shoes, whose only adornment was a fresh coat of blacking. They failed to see that she swerved more than once from the chalk lines, which indicated the limits allowed for grace and the extra "steps" which were sometimes indulged in by the prize walkers. The purple dress, the white feather, and the laughing black eyes were carrying everything before them. She nodded here and smiled there, and once — it was just at the moment when she caught the eye of tall Rufe the barber — she actually lifted her hand to her lips and threw a kiss.

Such a shout as went up!

"Uh-uh! dat gal kin walk wid her eye shet." "Cake-walkin's easy ez eatin' ter dat nigger." "Some folks'll hab ter git up 'fo' day ef dey beats dat 'ar'." "Land o' Canaan! Look at dat, will somebody?"

She reached the end of the room in a perfect storm of applause.

"Raised sech a wind de feather in her haid got ter wavin' hits own se'f," one of the sisters was heard to declare, while another even got up and shook hands with the candidate, and told her in a knowing way that "dey ain' been no sech walkin' as dat, not sence de war."

And then, when the noise had subsided, came 'Liza's turn. She took her place where the late victor had taken hers, and in her turn awaited the signal to start. She felt, by that intuition that comes to all of us, that she had lost in the gain of her rival; but she had friends who were still loyal, still hopeful, still enthusiastic.

She glanced at tall Rufe, but he was bending over the white feather, unconscious of, or else indifferent to the fact that she, his own "Sweet 'Laases," was at that moment about to pass through the painful ordeal of walking for the prize. She turned her eyes away. One more glance in that direction, and the red shoes would never be called upon to bear her upon the journey down that long yellow pine plank. The next moment she rallied and took courage. Rufe looked up, smiled, and came a step nearer. After all, she had a chance to win; and should she lose, she still had him, her lover. Life couldn't be wholly void nor defeat utterly crushing so long as fate left her love.

She lifted her skirts, ever so slightly, when the signal for starting had been given. There was a ripple, slight, but sufficient to show that the tide *might* be turned.

A trifle higher rose the gray skirt; there was a hint of fluted ruffling visible at the hem, white and neat as 'Liza's hand could make it. Not one there but rendered Cæsar his due when it came to laundry. Not one but had great respect for the tub over which 'Liza Ann presided.

If she had not been so set upon calling attention to the slippers, poor 'Liza! all might have been well. But the slippers were her ruin; the slippers, designed for triumph, were destined to prove her downfall. She had the attention of the house; her late enemy herself leaned forward with parted lips and flashing eye to watch the progress of the red feet down the pine plank.

'Liza had many little tricks of grace; she had a way of turning her toes a trifle out and then giving them a sudden turn in; sometimes she would lift one foot, like a young pullet about to steal upon a forbidden flower-bed where the seed has been newly sown, and then follow it cautiously with the other. This step never failed to elicit applause. The other girl had really taken no "steps;" they would remember it when 'Liza Ann had showed them hers. Sometimes she minced, like an old maid that is afraid of not being graceful; but being young and free from any hint of awkwardness, in 'Liza the trick was passed for grace, as other old tricks will sometimes pass upon young tricksters. And again sometimes she would drop into a long, swinging step that was the perfection of grace itself.

She had just started out upon her programme when another stitch broke in the back seam of the slipper. Another step and she remembered the ironing-board and the long tramp to carry the clothes home. She was tired! One step more and — ah! there was an unmistakable *limp* in the pretty walk.

A limp that grew with every movement

of the scarlet slippers. R-r-r-r went the seam at the back, and r-r-r-r went 'Liza's hopes and 'Liza's heart.

While the judges were taking the vote she crept outside and drew on her old shoes, folded the remains of the red slippers under her shawl and made ready to go home. She had lost the prize; she knew that; but she was too tired to care very much, and after all she had her lover. She waited there for him, at the door, back in the shadow where the light from the lantern above the door could not find her; waited and revelled in the sympathy which, after all, was as sweet to anticipate as the victory had been.

The crowd filed out, singly, then in groups, laughing, joking, enjoying or commiserating her defeat. Nobody saw the lonely little figure crouched against the shadowed wall; not even Rufe, who came out at last, the prize-winner upon one arm, and the great cake, the beautiful angel cake, lifted high above his head with the other.

They passed so close she could have touched them with her fingers, but she would as soon have thought of touching a poisonous reptile.

She hurried home alone, and fumbled under the doorstep for the key. As the door swung back, a golden dash of moonlight streamed into the room, showing her the white-spread table and the preparations she had made for her lover's coming.

The memory of joy anticipated, though it be nipped in the first fond flower of its conception, is sometimes more keenly bitter than the actual death of the joy itself.

'Liza Ann had kept her disappointment down and had held her grief under restraint, until that carefully prepared table with its mocking decoration of crimson flowers met her eyes. The white cloth was like a shroud to her poor heart.

She walked over to the fireplace, stirred the red coals into a white heat, and with a hand that did not falter she tossed the red shoes into the equally red coal-bed. Then she dropped into the seat she had set for her lover and, burying her face in the snowy table-cloth, burst into tears.

"Hit ain't de angul cake," she sobbed; "I don't keer nothin' 'bout de ole angul cake; I don't keer fur de money flung 'way on de shoes, an' I don't keer 'bout dey-alls laffin' at me, — *but I heerd him call dat yaller gal his Sweet 'Laases!*"

A Grain of Gold

EVERYBODY said he would go to the bad; everybody expected it of him. Whether it was the fulfilment of the promise, "As thy faith so be it," or whether he felt any conscientious obligation resting upon him not to disappoint public expectation, nobody knows. Nobody was surprised, however, when news went over the town that Jim Royal was going to the penitentiary.

Going to "the pen" at sixteen years of age. Nobody thought of that. Moreover, the old Tennessee prison contains scores of boys *under* sixteen, for that matter; and if they do not work satisfactorily, the lessees of the prison have made no complaint of them; therefore, they *do* work satisfactorily; for the lessees are not likely to pay the State for the privilege of feeding worthless hands. But as for vagabond Jim, if anybody thought of him at all, it was something after this wise:

"Safe place. Keep him out of mischief. Protect other people's boys. Bad influence, Jim's. Town's scourge. Bad mother before him. Questionable father. Made to work."

Now there were two considerations in this category, concerning which the public opinion was exactly correct. More so, indeed, than public opinion is usually known to be. Namely: Jim would "be made to work." No doubt about that. There were straps for the obstreperous, the water-pump for the sullen, the pool for the belligerent, the lash for the lazy, and for the rebellious, — the shotgun.

Oh, yes; Jim would be made to work. The town was quite right about that.

The other consideration, although not

altogether so important, was a trifle more interesting. Jim's "questionable father!"

It was his mother's fault that public *interest* (?) was not gratified. And it never forgave the poor outcast for leaving the world with that seal of secrecy still unbroken. The heart broke, but not the seal. They cast her off utterly when, poor girl-mother, she stubbornly refused to reveal the name of her betrayer. To them there was nothing heroic in the answer, "Because *my* life is ruined, shall I ruin his?"

So they treasured it against her in her grave, and against her son after her, in his grave too: that living, loathsome sepulchre, the State prison.

But they had surmised a good deal regarding Jim's paternal parentage. They searched for resemblances, birthmarks, peculiarities of feature, owning that nature always set her brand upon the bastard, and that the features, as well as the iniquities of the father, are always visited upon the illegitimate. If this be the case, Jim must have come of some strange blood. Knowing him and his history, some might have traced the poor mother in the boy, although of that mother he knew very little. He had been told — oh, yes, he had been told — that she was found in a garret one December morning with a vagabond baby nursing at her dead breast. And old Nancy Piatt, the only one who ever seemed to dislike talking to the lad about it, had told him that she was "a pretty corpse; as pretty as the grave ever held," and that the dead lips "wore a smile," those dead lips that never would, and never could, give up their pitiful secret. Poor lips; death had granted that which life denied them, — a smile. Stubbornness, the town gossips called the woman's silence. In other circumstances it would have answered to the higher term of fidelity, or, perhaps, heroism. Jim was very like his mother, old Nancy said, despite Dame Nature's habit of branding. Surely Nancy ought to be authority, for when the boy was left, at two months old, on the town, old Nancy Piatt, a drunken old crone, who washed the clothes of the rich all the week, and drank her earnings Saturday evenings, was the only one who offered to "take the cub" whom the authorities were ready to give away.

A sorry chance had Jim, although he never realised that. At ten he could drink as much liquor as Nancy herself, and outswear the ablest lawyer in the town. At twelve he could pick a lock better than a blacksmith, and was known as one of the most cunning sneak-thieves in the place. At fourteen he beat a little boy of eight unmercifully. (Did anybody expect old Nancy to tell him that was the crown crime of cowardice?)

Then some one suspected Nancy of a crime. One of those nameless crimes concerning which the law is very jealous, not considering the slander prevented, the "good name preserved," and the disgrace averted. All in high circles, and all set in the scale against a useless little baby,— a wicked little illegitimate baby, that is so heartless as to be born, and thereby bring a world of trouble upon wealthy and respectable people.

That old Nancy — for handsome considerations—had made away with the selfish baby, Jim knew as well as anybody. And when he was offered quite as handsome a sum to tell all he knew about it, his reply was to plant his fist in the eye of the man who had made the offer. Not that he cared for the cause the babe's coming had disgraced. He only meant to stand by old Nance, and not all the money in the county's coffers could have forced his lips to speak that which would hurt her. He was afterward arrested and brought before the magistrate, together with Nance, and swore, not by the calendared saints, — he hadn't made their acquaintance, — but by "George," by "Gum," by "Gosh," and even by God himself, that he knew nothing at all about the matter. They knew he was lying, but there was no way to prove it, as he attempted no dodge. He was merely ignorant. Nance hadn't asked him to do this; she knew he would do it if necessary. She had not attempted to win his love, his confidence, or his gratitude. Perhaps she believed, in her blind way, that these things are born, not won, like respect, and honour, and admiration. He was fifteen when this happened. At sixteen Nance died from the effects of a blow from a policeman's club while trying to arrest her. Two weeks later the policeman died from the effects of a blow from Jim's club while trying to protect old Nance. Two *months* later the prison door closed on Jim, and the town took breath again in a long, relieved sigh of "*Safe at last!*" As if vagabond Jim's salvation had lain a weight for sixteen years upon their consciousness.

It was certainly the face of a hardened creature that followed the sheriff to the railroad station that June morning. June, sweet old love-laden, rose-burdened June. Of all the year, to give up one's freedom in June! And how many years before he would breathe the free, rose-haunted air of another June? Twenty. Why, the twentieth century would be dawning before he would be free again. Would his face be any the less hard at the expiration of his term? *The penitentiary isn't a hotbed of virtue*, and Jim wasn't wax. Nobody wasted any hopes on him, — except the lessees, who, finding him able-bodied, young, and healthy, sent him to the Branch prison to dig coal.

True, an old gray-bearded warden offered a plea for his youth, and a protest against the associations of the Branch, and was promptly reminded that the Tennessee State prison was not a reformatory institute, but that it had been leased as a financial speculation, which was expected to yield at *least* ten per cent. on the money invested by the lessees.

So Jim went to the coal mines in the mountains, leaving his life, his poor, puny sixteen years of dust and degradation, behind him. If there was anything of brightness, any softening memory, any tender touch of the human — *dream* touches are they to the castaway — which Jim carried with him, it was the memory of old Nance, drunken, filthy, murderous old Nance, and the face of the gray-bearded warden who had lifted his voice in his behalf.

It was noon of a day in June, early in the eighties, that Jim trudged across the coal-sprinkled ridge upon which rose the great gray, weather-beaten, rat-infested fence, which was dignified by the name of stockade. To go out of life into a dungeon like that, and at noon of a day in June! That Jim made no sign was accredited to his hardness of heart. That, having registered and heard an official sneer at the name, Jim Royal, and having passed through the hands of the barber, and being duly entered at last among the State's hired help, and dropped down on his ill-smelling bunk, a rat came and gnawed his ear, and the vermin crawled unmolested over him, and still he gave no sign, was set down to the account of his laziness.

"He won't be vicious," the warden said, "he is too lazy," and he thought yearningly of the rawhide lash hanging in the office. That the stupor might be the result of weariness had never once suggested itself. If it had, why, still there was the lash. The lessees' ten per cent. must be gotten out of that herd in the stockade, even if it should be necessary to beat it out.

But when, the next morning, Jim fell into his place as brisk as any, the warden began to waver between the lash and the pool. If he did not need the one, he was fairly sure to require the other. All of them needed some one, may be two, of the prison's medicines, and the warden made a special point of spying out the diseases of new arrivals, and applying the remedy as soon as possible. It told them, more plainly than words, precisely the manner of treatment they were to expect in case of any appearance of any of the several moral diseases with which all convicts, young, old, rich, or poor, were supposed to be afflicted.

Therefore, the warden "had his eye on Jim." And when the gang started from the stockade across the black, coal-dusted mountains, to the blacker mine beneath, he called to the new arrival, draining the last of some sloppy coffee from a dingy tin cup at the greasy board table of the shed room that served for dining-room and laundry during the week, and for chapel on Sundays:

"Come here, sir; what's your name, sir? At least, what one did you leave on the book out there?"

"The only one I've got," said Jim. "The clerk down there made it to spell Royal."

"Royal." A sneer curled the lips of the official. "Here, Black," — to the guard, — "add this royal renegade to your company. Here, you fellow, fall into line here, and be quick about it."

To Jim, accustomed from the day his dead mother's nipple had been taken from his toothless gums to having his own free will, the surly command came like a threat. He hesitated.

"Will you come, you bit of carrion, or shall I fetch you?"

Jim stood like a young lion at bay. His hands unconsciously drew up into fists; one foot moved forward; the prisoners stood in wondering groups, some recalling the day, five, ten, fifteen, ay, even twenty years before, when they, too, had thought of defiance. They, too, had stood at bay. But they had learned the folly of it, and they knew Jim would learn too; but still they half hoped he would get in that one blow before the lesson began.

Such fists! Such strength! And he came on like a young tiger, his eyes ablaze, his nostrils quivering, his arm poised, his full chest expanding, perfectly aware the officer was feeling for the pistol at his belt, when, quick and noiseless, a small hand, delicate as a woman's, reached out and drew the clenched fist down; a voice, softened by despair, said: "It isn't any use; they'll down you at last, and you only make it harder."

It was all done so quickly, the guards around had not had time "to draw," else the rebellious one had received the reward of rebellion.

The warden replaced his pistol, with a curse upon it for not obeying his effort to draw it. The young convict had ceased hostilities, and stood submissive by the side of his unknown friend. He had not once glanced at him, but something in his voice had controlled and subdued his passion.

"Away with him," cried the officer.

"To the pump, and afterward to the pool. Get the straps ready there. We'll show our *royal* friend who is master here."

Again came an idea of resistance, but the same small hand was laid upon his arm.

"My friend, it isn't any use. I tried it all. Go on and be punished. It is part of the life here. You receive it whether merited or not."

They dragged him off, strapped him, hand and foot, and writhing, foaming, like the untamed wild beast that he was, they thrust him under the great prison pump.

"That will cool his royal blood," laughed a guard, as the fearful force of the cold current beating upon his shaven head knocked him senseless.

Drenched and beaten, utterly exhausted, he lay like a limp rag, until three men had spent their strength upon the pump. Then to the pool they dragged him, and "ducked" him three times into the dark, stagnant water. Then back to the warden, who asked if he "thought he had enough."

"Not enough to make me take your jaw," was the foolish answer.

"The lash," said the warden, and the miserable, half-drowned creature was taken away to be beaten "into subjection."

The guard overlooked the punishment. A stout, burly convict was required to perform it. He would have refused, being in like strait, only that he knew the uselessness. He had been there a long time, many years, and, according to his sentence, would be there for fifty more. He had picked up a little Scripture at the prison Sunday school, so that when he lifted the whip above the back they had made bare for it, he whispered, by way of apology:

"And one Simon, a Cyrenian, him they compelled to bear the cross."

But Jim didn't understand, even if he had heard. All he heard was that low, patient voice calling him "friend."

In the afternoon he was sent down to

the mines, subdued but not conquered. Every evil passion of his nature had been aroused, and would never slumber again.

After that first day's experience he seemed indeed a wild beast. He fought among the prisoners, rebelled against the rules of the prison, would have nothing to do with any but the worst of the men, shirked his work until he had to be strapped and beaten; in short made a record that had never been surpassed by any previous man on the prison books.

Yet, when there was danger of any kind, he was the first there. One morning there was an explosion in the mine, and more than a score of prisoners were in danger of being suffocated before help could reach them. Indeed, everybody was afraid to venture in that black hole from which the hot, sulphurous gases were pouring. Everybody but Jim. Even the warden had to admit Jim's courage. "He ain't afraid of the devil," he declared, when he saw the boy jump into an empty coal-car, call to the mule to "git up," and disappear in the gas and smoke with the empty cars rumbling behind him. It was a long time before he came out, but he brought ten insensible convicts in his first haul. The lessees recommended him for that, and promised to make it good sometime if he kept on at that rate.

Another time there was a fire. The rumbling old rat-hole was threatened with destruction, and with it three hundred and seventy-five of the State's charges. The men glared like beasts through the cracks of the tottering stockade. Liberty, it would come surely in some form. The fire was confined for a time to the wing where the hospital was. But when it mounted in a great blood-dappled sheet of flame to the top of an old rotten tower above the main building, where the prisoners were huddled, it became evident that all must go unless the old tower could be torn away. Up the uneven, rickety wall went Jim, nimble as a squirrel. Crack! crack! fell the dead boards; then with a clang and clamour, down rolled the old bell from its perch, carrying with it the last of the burning tower.

Jim climbed down as sullen as ever. He didn't care to save the old shanty, or to win any praise from anybody. He was simply not afraid, and his courage would not permit him to do other than what he did.

Nobody cared for him specially, although the soft-voiced man with the small, womanish hands spoke to him often, and always kindly. Jim never forgot that he had called him friend. The memory of it stayed with him, like the kiss of a first love that lingers long after love is dead. Most of the men were afraid of him, so fierce was his temper, and so easily aroused. Even the warden had learned that he could not tame him. The strap, the lash, the pool, the pump, had been applied times without number. The warden was still "looking around" for the time to apply the last resource, the shotgun. It was pretty sure to come, for the boy was entirely "unscrupulous."

Summer set in again. Again June came, and tried to bloom even on the coal-tracked mountain about the mine. Somewhere up, back among the pine and shadows, the wild roses were blooming, and the grapes. Their odours came down to the men as they tramped across the hot, bare, coal-strewn way between the stockade and the mines.

With the coming of June came a number of strangers to the mountain. They always came in the warm season, but they quartered themselves over in the town, beyond the stockade, and the stench, and filth, and crime found there.

Only one, a young man, a minister who had been expelled from the church in the city where he had preached, found his way to the prison. He went out one Sunday afternoon, and asked permission to preach to the convicts. It was freely granted. Such wild heresy! Such odd, eccentric ideas! Such flights of oratory! Such fiery brands tossed into the old tabernacles of religious belief! Such blows upon the old batteries of narrowness and impossibility! They had never heard anything like it. Had he preached thus anywhere else he would have been promptly silenced. But a lot of convicts was not an audience likely to be injured by the too free circulating of the doctrine he advocated. What if he should convince them that eternal punishment was a myth, and an insult flung in the face of the Creator? A slur upon his justice, and a lie to his divine goodness? What if he snapped his finger at a lake of brimstone and of eternal fire? And his wild ravings about an inconsistent Being, accepted as the head of all wisdom, and tenderness, and mercy, and at the same time as the perfection of all cruelty and injustice, in that he creates only to destroy,—what if the seed scattered should take root? What if those old sin-blackened souls should comfort themselves with the new doctrine, the idea that no good can be lost? God cannot be God and destroy any good thing. It is wicked, it is devilish, to kill that which is good. God cannot be wicked and be the good God, the kind All-Father, at the same time. Nor has he created any so vile as to be without some one virtue. In the dust of the evil he has not failed to drop one grain of gold to glisten, and to make glad the dull waste of life. The grain is there, planted by God's hand, in *every* soul. It was in *their* souls, poor, old, sin-covered, forsaken souls, toiling up to the light through those begrimed walls, among the filth, and dust, and mould. Not one of them but was God's work, and bore his grain of gold. None would be lost, not one. What matter if the prison registrar's table of death did record so many "Found dead!" "Drowned!" "Killed!" "Shot!" "Blank!" "Blank!" "Blank!" Meaning they disappeared, nobody knows how or when.

It was a strange, sweet hope to them, that came in that wild sermon of a bishop-silenced young heretic. They thought about it a good deal, and began, some of them whose terms were to expire with life, to dig down into the rust and mire with the spade of conscience for the hidden grain.

The minister was at the stockade often, cheering, sympathising, and always comforting the convicts with the certainty of eternal love, and the folly of eternal punishment. One day he stumbled upon a man who was being strapped and prepared for punishment at the pump. His face was sullen, and there were splotches of blood upon his clothes, and he limped when he attempted to walk. Still there was something in the old young face that neither cruelty nor threats could kill. They might turn on the icy water, and exhaust themselves with lashing him, but that stoic determination would not yield. They might *murder* him, but from his fixed, dead eyes, *it* would glare at them, that same heroic, immovable *something* that had shone in the staring eyes of his dead mother.

No visitors were allowed in that part of the prison, so the minister held back until, fearing the limp figure under the pump would be beaten to death by the cruel pour of water upon his head, he stepped forward to interfere.

"In God's name, I beg you to stop," he cried, his hand uplifted, his eyes full of tears. "Your punishment is beastly. What has the fellow done? Is some one murdered?"

"Some one ought to be," sullenly replied the man at the pump-handle. "And some one might be if this sneaking rascal was the only hope of preventing it."

There had been a plot among the convicts to batter down the shaky old stockade, and break for freedom. They had secured a gun and some ammunition, where, no one could tell, and the plot had well-nigh succeeded. The guard on the wall had been killed, three men had escaped, and the prison bloodhounds were lying in the kennel with their throats cut.

Already the governor of the State had telegraphed freedom to the convicts not in the scheme who would give the names of those engaged in it. Even the leader's name; for *that* freedom was offered, pardon unconditional.

Something let fall discovered to the warden that Jim, while not in, was familiar with the whole history of the insurrection. The offer of freedom had no further effect upon him than a careless refusal to comply with the terms set forth. But when force was suggested, he set his lips in that old way that belonged to his mother, and said nothing. Three days they gave him to "knock under." But the only change noticeable during that time was a more decided sullenness, a look in the cold gray eyes that meant death rather than yielding.

Once the soft-voiced young man who had put out his hand in his defence the day of his arrival at the stockade, and had afterwards called him "friend," the only time he had ever heard the word addressed to himself, once the young man came over where Jim sat cleaning the warden's boots, and motioned him.

Jim shook his head, and went on blacking the big boots. But when the young convict drew nearer, and tried to take his hand, he drew back, and struck at him viciously with the blacking-brush.

"Git out, will you! And don't come a-fooling with this brush, lest you want your d—n head broke."

He had seen a guard spying upon them at a half open door in the rear of the young convict. At Jim's outburst of temper the guard entered.

"Come away from him, Solly," he said. "The surly beast is as like as not to knock your brains out."

The convict turned to obey, but the

glance he got of Jim's face carried a full explanation. The temper was affected to keep down suspicion. After that came the punishment at the pump, the merciless beating, and then, all things proving unavailing, he was put in the dungeon to have the "truth starved out of him."

After three days he was brought out, faint, pale, ready to die at every step, but with that same immovable *something* shining in his eyes, and his lips still set in the old way that he had of his mother.

His hands were manacled, and an iron chain clanked about his feet as he dragged them wearily one after the other. For three days he had tasted no food, except a rat that he had caught in the dungeon. He ate it raw, like a dog, and searched eagerly for another. Just as he had found it, and skinned it with the help of his teeth, the guard peered through the grating, and seeing what he was doing, entered and put the handcuffs upon him, after first removing the raw flesh to a point where he could see, but not touch it. And there it lay, torturing him while he starved. And there it lay until it became carrion, and tortured him again. And then they had dragged him out again; out under the blue sky, where the trees—the old sweet-smelling pines — were waving their purple plumes upon the distant mountains, and the wild grape filled the air with perfume, and the wild roses were pink as childhood's sweet, young dreams, and over all was bending the blue heaven. And heaven spread before him, heaven; behind him lay hell, fifteen years of it less one. And they gave him choice again betwixt the two. They even crammed a bit of moral in the offer. "It was right," they said, "to tell on those who had broken the prison regulations; mere justice to the lessees." Right! too late to talk to *him* of right. He glanced once at the pines, going farther away, whiffed at the pleasant odour of the grapes, waved his hand to the roses, in farewell, perhaps, lifted his face to the blue heaven, — he had never looked heavenward before in all his wretched years, — then, wearing that same old look of his mother's, he turned, without a word, and reëntered the prison.

Back to the pump, the lash, and at last to the dungeon.

But he no longer dreaded it. It was the Sabbath, and the shackles had been removed, but he was too weary to notice the rat that came out and sat peering at him, nibbling at his wet prison clothes, and his feet and hands. Even the carrion did not disturb any more. The scent of the wild grape blooms was still in his nostrils. And when the day wore on, and the two o'clock bell sounded, calling the men to Sunday school, he started up with a cry of "Here." He had thought the bell a voice at the dungeon door, and fancied that it said, "Friend."

He dropped back, with a smile on his lips. Could old Nance have peered in at that moment she would have pronounced him very like his mother with that smile, and that stanch old heroism shining in his wide, dead eyes.

Down in the office the registrar entered upon the death list:

"James Royal — Natural death."

Natural? Then God help the unnatural.

"The worst one ever fell into our hands," the warden told the minister as he came out of the chapel with the soft-voiced friend of the dead man's. "Not a spark of good in *him*, parson. Jim Royal knocks your theory all to pieces."

But the friend had been telling the minister a story. And as he passed out at the rattling stockade gate, he, too, glanced up at the blue sky. His doubts were gone, if there had been any; his faith was planted in God's eternal goodness.

"Can such die?" he mused; "such faithfulness, such magnificent courage, such glorious fidelity? Is it possible that such can pass away into eternal torment?"

The soft wind touched his cheek and bore heavenward the prayer he breathed:

"Forbid it, Almighty God."

A Day in Asia

IT was a great day in Asia, — a *gala* day, some would have said, — for although the occasion was a religious one, it was not without its tinsel, its dash of jollity, and its flash of fashion. It was the day of the great annual foot-washing of the coloured Baptists, — " de Hard-shells, honey, ez some names de 'Hard-sides,' an' den, agin, some names de ole 'Primunters.' "

Once a year it comes, — the " big meet'n'," that is always held in Asia, the little negro settlement on the banks of the Elk, that creeps along with noiseless content among the foothills of the Cumberlands. A foot-washing, — why, heaven itself has built the basin, and set it flowing, fresh, fair, and free. Surely the rivers of Tennessee — are they not better than all the tubs of Asia? Might they not wash in them and be clean?

By sunup the hordes were on the way. They came by horse, by foot, and by great wagon-loads, — each with a basket, each wearing his holiday dress, and each with soul brimful, running over, breaking out, with religion.

The *breaking out* assumed a varied form. Sometimes it was a loud laugh, at a moment when all was still; sometimes a deep groan as a solitary horseman passed a wagon-load of worshippers; sometimes it became a shriek, a cry of "Glory! glory! my soul's happy, *en* I wanter go home;" again it was a fervent "*Amen!*" and again a knowing "Hmk-umk!" sometimes it was a quiet interchange of "news," friendly gossip, as two wagons came in speaking distance; and *sometimes* it took the form of a lively, if brief, little fight in a wagon where two women wrangled over their respective titles to one escort. The fight must, however, have been tinctured with religious fervour; for at the close of each bout the combatants closed their eyes, adjusted anew their mutilated finery, and, swaying back and forth with the rocking of the wagon, began to sing,—sometimes together with the same tune, sometimes in solo, and *sometimes* each with her own preferred hymn, and each trying to out-sing the other. The favourite melody, however, and drawn out with that long, fervent, not unmusical drawl that is peculiar to the negro, was one in which all the inmates of the wagon joined, and even the passing horsemen now and then lent their voices to swell the chorus:

"Ez I wen' down in de valley ter pray,
Glory! Glory! Glory!
Steddyin' about dat good ole way,
Glory! Glory! Glory!
Marse Jesus, he come erlong dat day,
Glory! Glory! Glory!

CHORUS.

"Lawd, who's gwine ter w'ar dat stairry crown,
Lawd, who's gwine ter w'ar dat stairry crown,
Lawd, who's gwine ter w'ar dat stairry crown,
Ter meet my Jesus in de Glory?

"Whar I wen' down ter wras'le en pray,
Glory! Glory! Glory!
Marse Jesus, he come erlong dat day,
Glory! Glory! Glory!
A-p'intin' out dat good ole way,
Glory! Glory! Glory!"

The song rose and fell, reverberating with peculiar sweetness among the hills at times, at times jarring inharmoniously, as some twangy treble strove to reach a tone above the voices of the others. Sometimes it was as if the very heart of nature stood still to listen; sometimes a fox, secure in the distance, barked a rejoinder from the river bluffs far below the winding road to Asia, or a blue jay, with sacrilegious impertinence, sent back a note of contempt in response to the hymn as the wagons passed under his nesting-place.

Once, only, however, was there any serious opposition offered; this was in the case of a diminutive yellow fise that ran out from a farmyard, and with shrill and vigorous barking, elevated tail and ears, vociferously disputed the right of way to Asia.

Despite the protestations of the fise, however, Asia was expecting her guests. Every door stood wide open, as if Hospitality had stepped outside to meet half way the visitors. The houses were tiny cabins, neatly whitewashed and carefully adorned with vines of every creeping kind.

A little garden spot was basking in the sunlight about every door, and, being too early in the season for vegetables, the gardens did duty as ornament. There were tulips and phlox and petunias, lady pease in full bloom, cymlings with yellow blossoms, peeping slyly at the bolder colouring of its neighbour and kinsman, the gourd. A pretty scene, and flanked by a still prettier, where the mountains lifted their craggy summits to the clouds, purple with the haze of distance. Nearer the pines were waving their long arms to the river, the gentle Elk, nestled among the laurel-crowned bluffs.

A good day for worship; such a day as might have charmed the Druids to their temples, or, indeed, made all the world turn Druid and worship likewise in the groves.

Most of the cabins were empty, their owners gone down the road to meet expected friends.

No fear of thieves to-day; the rogues would all be at "meet'n'." "Be dar long ob de balunce ob de Chrischuns," the Widow Brown declared, as she spread her table, before leaving for the little "meet'n'-house" at the foot of the hill beyond the river.

The widow was a pillar of the church in Asia. She was "well off," too, so far as this world's goods were concerned. And she was a "good liver," a rarely "good feeder," — a something unusual among the coloured race, who work well, cook well and carefully for their white employers, but who do their own work with a half-hearted, unwholesome disregard of both health and comfort.

The Widow Brown lived well; everybody in Asia knew her cooking. And even among the visitors many a hope was harboured that the widow would "ax me ter fetch my baskit ter her house."

She had her own plans, however. She had sent out no invitations for that day, although the dinner-table, when the "good liver" stood back to admire it, might have fed all Asia. She meant to have *one* guest, and but one. She had even sent her children over to Winchester the day before, on a visit to their *gran'-pap*, in order to have a clear field and a day without interruption.

She had put the last touch to the big pound cake when she caught sight of a stumpy gray tail in the sumach thicket in the rear of the church, where the preacher always hitched his mule.

The preacher is the idol, the good God in human form, of his members. The Widow Brown was not the only one of his flock who had been watching for the switch of that gray mule's tail in the sumach thicket.

She was the first to get there, however, and she was blissfully ignorant that "lill' Sis Moore," the young mulattress who lived "a piece up de road, on de side todes de mount'n," had run down the road, at her mother's request, to speak to the parson as he went by.

The widow found him beside his mule,—the Reverend Benjamin Franklin George Washington Henderson,—fat, fifty, and well fed by the members of the respective churches under his charge. She was *first*, evidently, to greet the mogul.

"How *you* does, Brudder Hen'son?" she began.

"I's toler'ble," said the brother.

"How's yo folks does, Brudder Hen'son?"

"Dey's toler'ble."

"Yo ma well, Brudder Hen'son?"

"She's toler'ble."

"*You* well, Brudder Hen'son?"

"I's toler'ble. How's *you*, Siste' Brown?"

"I's toler'ble."

"Yo folks well?"

"Dey's toler'ble. You come t' my house ter dinner, Brudder Hen'son. I got nice lill' bar'bcue shoat fur dinner ter-day."

The reverend gentleman chuckled.

"Lill' Sis Moore done ax me ter dinner wid dey-alls."

The widow's face wore for an instant a mingled expression of doubt, disappointment, and good-natured determination.

"Dat lill' heifer?" She laughed aloud. "She ain' no han' ter cook vittuls. You come t' my house, Brudder Hen'son; dat's de fattes lill' peeg yo eber sot yer teef in, *I* tell ye."

Alas for the widow! The bright young face of "Lill' Sis" had raised a tumult in the reverend old heart. Other things than juicy pigs and pound cake swayed the holy man to-day and controlled his movements.

"Her say dey-all's peeg more fatter en your'n," laughed the parson.

At this the widow showed fight. She would not have her cooking slandered; not at all.

"Sis Moore's mouf ain't no pra'r book," she declared; "en no dicshuner, neider, ef it *do* op'n en shet. I knock her teef down her thoat she say dat. You tek dinner at my house, Brudder Hen'son. De good book say yer boun' ter kep keer ob de widder en de orf'n, Brudder Hen'son. Hit doan sey noth'n' bout young gals ez runs roun' arter folks ter eat dey peegs up. I's de widder woman de Bible tells 'bout, I is. You be sho' ter come ter my house, Brudder Hen'son!"

The arrival of others cut short all further conversation. The widow consoled herself that her cause was not hopeless.

"Dat peeg'll tetch up his 'mem'bunce all *dis* day," she told herself.

Everybody made it a point to seek out the preacher. Soon such a crowd had collected about the reverend gentleman that the widow moved off, to mingle with the visitors who were come to worship in Asia.

There was aunt Ellen, the conjure woman, who could charm away warts and lift spells,—a shining light among the Hardshells, alias Hardsides, alias "Primunters."

And there was "old Jinny," who had a habit of talking to herself; a habit known among her class as "talkin' wid de ole boy," for it is a belief with them that to talk to one's self is to talk with the devil.

Then there was "Lean Jim," the rag buyer. Other things than rags had been found in Jim's sack, often. But nobody charged Jim with that "at meet'n'." Moreover, Jim had long ago explained how these things happened. They happened in Benjamin's day, too, he declared, and in Benjamin's sack.

"'Count o' bein' put dar fur ter bring reproach upon de Chrischuns. Dar's lots o' meanness in *dis* worl', honey, lots *en* lots ob it."

So Jim argued in setting himself straight *with the church*. At Asia Jim occupied the right-hand *amen* corner, and led in the foot-washing.

Then there was among the celebrities in Asia, that last foot-washing day, May, first Sunday, year eighteen hundred ninety-two, aunt Milly, "de oldes' 'oman in de worl', honey."

Too old, indeed, to care for or to desire any other name than simple "aunt Milly." As to age, the negro has a peculiar idea. Ask aunt Milly, for instance, "How old are you, aunt Milly?"

"Lor, honey, I done furgit, long 'go. I been here long time, — mighty long time. I spec' I been here *twenty year*, might nigh."

And near aunt Milly, calmly sedate, "jes wait'n fur de trumpit," sat aunt Winnie, another of the old-timers. Her ideas of time are as vague as those of the old woman at her side. She has spent her life puzzling over her age. "Ole marse died fo' I uz ole nuff ter want ter know," she was wont to declare. "Den ole miss, her died too, an' nuver telled. En dey ain' nobody else ter ax. But I's mos' two hundred, I reckin. I sho' am, — fur I wuz here fo' de war, chile. Dat I wuz. I's boun' ter be nigh two hundred."

Of a truth she was about forty-five; while aunt Milly, "mos' twenty," was long past the seventieth mile-post.

Another distinguished worshipper in Asia was "Short Ann," the stumpy little old woman who "made soap fur de whole country."

"Don' mek it tweel de moon gits right, *ef* yer please. En fur de Lord's sake don't cep' one ob de family stir hit. Hit won't jelly ef two stirs de kittle; hit sho' won't."

Uncle Sam, the witch-ridden, was there, too, assisting in the services. "He say de witches rid him agin las' night, en he got a wire roun' 'is neck fur ter keep 'em off."

So the good sisters told each other while they waited at the church door for Yellow Jane, the fortune-teller, who was crossing the foot-log with "lill' Jack," her boy, who had been conjured "so's he los' growth," held in the hollow of her side, just above the right hip. All come to *meet'n*,—all come to worship together. Witch and wizard, saint and sinner, old and young, the halt and the whole, the ignorant and superstitious, the rogue, the honest man, the gay and thoughtless, the old and careful, all Christians, all brothers for that one day, all of one nature at last: a nature that laughs at poverty, shakes its fist in the face of want, and sings over the corpse of morality as lustily as over the washtub of a day in June, — an emotional nature, touched to despair by grief and ready to break into shouting before the presence of joy, — all one in that Asia day.

Such a day! Asia had never felt a fairer. The worshippers were loath to leave the sunlight, the ride, the gay little street of the village, where they wandered about, with gossip and friendly greeting.

They were all brethren for one day. All the burdens of life were laid down, thrown off; all the rest of the year they might toil, suffer, battle with poverty and pain, but this day, this one day, — ah, it was so much snatched from life! — this their one day in Asia.

The service of the morning was to begin at ten o'clock. At half-past nine the worshippers had begun to move in the direction of the church, not knowing they were sorry to give up the sunshine and the gossip.

At ten they were all in, seated decorously in their places, their hearts full of warmth, their tongues tuned for praise.

The preacher rose; he was a poor man, a widower, and one not too often surfeited with the good things of this world. If visions of roasted pig, savoury odours of vinegar and spice, and crisping bacon mingled with his devotions, the devotees of Asia were in blissful ignorance of their pastor's wanderings. He arose with his accustomed dignity, a hymn-book, held bottom up, in his hand.

"Brudderin," he began, "you will please to sing the hymn on de page —" he paused. Through the wide open door a spectacle was presented which held his ecclesiastical gaze until the whole congregation turned to see what it might be that had attracted him.

The widow's little pig might simmer in its own bastings; far better a dinner of herbs where *love* is, than the fatted porker of the unloved member.

Down the little foot-path through the red-oak woods tripped a lithe, graceful figure of a young girl. Boldly, daringly gorgeous through the cool greens of the forest shone her attire, like the plumage of some brilliant bird. At first a dash of crimson, a flash of gay blue and filmy white, then came the full figure, in all its splendour, of little Sis Moore, the belle of Asia.

She wore a skirt of bright crimson, gaily festooned with lace, a cheap white cotton pattern, valued for its effect rather than its quality; a jacket of cheap blue silk, caught at the slender waist with a large rosette of blue ribbon and lace; a hat of coarse white straw, the whole scarcely larger than a bird's nest, with a cluster of large red roses planted tip-top the crown, and a fall of lace around the brim, making a rare setting for the bright, coquettish face beneath. She wore slippers, too, and *red stockings*. And, mighty straw to wreck the strained camel's back, above the giddy, girlish head, a *crimson parasol* flashed before the dazzled eyes of the worshippers, and the belle of Asia came down the path, lifted her skirts above the red-hosed ankle, tripped daintily over the foot-log, — the river was narrow at this point, — and deposited her finery in the very door of the meeting-house.

The parson, heavy and clumsy, was prepared to appreciate grace and nimbleness. He saw the apparition, the study in red, white, and blue; and his reverend old heart gave a bound that struck him for the moment dumb.

The Widow Brown saw, too, and the sight, from a different cause, produced a like effect. She broke off in her singing to express herself *unto* herself:

"Look at dat! Look *et* dat! Dat yaller nigger think she mighty fine, *I reckin*, becase she tuk de cake et de walkin' last night. Nice way ter glorify de Lawd. Ef I gits my han's on dem eyes, I ull scratch de brazenness out'n dem. I ull bus' her wide op'n *ef* I gits my han's on her, de low-live triflin' hussy, —

"'Marse Jesus he come erlong dat way,
Glory! Glory! Glory!'"

And the Widow Brown went bravely on with her devotions.

During the prayer, however, the widow became possessed of a desire to peep at the parson. "Hit's de debbul temptin' ob me, I knows," she told herself; and stooping a trifle lower upon her knees, she managed to look between the bowed heads about her, straight at the parson. He was kneeling, his hand before his face, "fairly wras'lin' in pra'r." Suddenly the fat fingers parted, just where they had met before the parson's left eye, and the Widow Brown groaned her contempt to see him, in the very agonies of prayer, steal a glance at the successful cake winner, the prize walker, Sis, the belle of Asia.

"Dat hussy!" But for the "Amens," and "Yes, Lords," and "Dar nows!" and "Hmk-umks!" that were ascending and descending in a hundred different sharps and flats, the widow's wrathful outbreak might have reached the very ears of the parson himself.

"Dat hussy! Ought ter be chuched; bofe ob 'em ought ter be chuched; ain' no 'ligion in such doin's."

Just then uncle Zack, the water-witch, took up the prayer where the preacher left off.

"Good Lawd," he began, "we's all bent en boun' fur de kingdom —"

"Amen!" said the widow. "Bless de Lawd! Dat's de Gord's troof. Bent en boun' fur de prommus lan'. Glory! glory! My soul's happy, en I wan' ter go home."

The "happiness" was evidently contagious, for in three minutes after the widow's outbreak the entire congregation, men, women, and children, had raised a shout. Every soul was "happy;" every soul "wanted to go *home*," — all except the girl sitting demurely on the second seat from the front, — the girl, Sis. She had been to school at Winchester, the county town, and had "learned better," she declared.

"L'arned de debbul," the Widow Brown said. "Done gone en got above everybody, en de gospil, its own se'f. Be ter big fur de kingdom come, I reckin, wid her fine clothes en her book readin's. L'arned to be 'bove foot-washin's en shoutin', en gloryin' in de Lawd!"

"No," the girl had replied to the charge. "I learned when's the proper time to wash yer feet, an' it be *Sadday night*."

So she took no part in the great annual event. More than one of the younger members would have liked to follow the lead of the pretty little heretic who had with her own hand sowed the first seed of doubt in that little assembly,—a seed that was destined to spring up; to yield ten, fifty, and an hundred fold.

She saw the benches moved back into four long rows,—two confronting each other on one side of the house, and two on the other; the left hand for the sisters, the right for the brethren. She saw the minister gird himself with a towel, a performance immediately followed by the congregation. She alone was left out; had no part with them. Yet she was smiling when Water-witch Zack and Lean Jim, the rag buyer, came in bringing each a tin pan filled with water, and set them, one between each row of benches. She saw the people begin to remove their shoes and stockings. The sisters took their places opposite each other on the left hand benches; the brethren separated to the other side. Each was girded with a towel. A hymn was sung, and during the singing the preacher removed his shoes and came down out of the pulpit to take a chair that had been set for him.

Lean Jim met him there with a tin basin, and he plunged his bare feet into it. Jim knelt upon one knee and took them, one foot at a time, between his palms, rubbed them gently, wiped them with the towel he wore; and then exchanging places while the congregation sang, Jim put *his* feet into the basin, and the preacher performed the humble service for him.

Then it was the occupants of the benches began. Each sister washed, and dried, with her towel, the feet of the sister opposite, and the vessel was passed on to the next, the singing being kept up by those whose turn had not yet come and those who had already performed. Among the brethren occupying the other rows of seats a similar scene was enacted. Midway the two lines the vessels were emptied through two convenient *holes* in the floor, prepared for that purpose, and fresh water supplied.

As the couples completed their part of the service they withdrew, and others were invited to "come forward and take their places."

The preacher could not read, but he explained again and again, as the occupants of the benches changed, that "havin' girded hisse'f with a towel, he took de cup, en give thanks, en sed tek it in de mem'brince ob me." A hopeless tangle of two institutions.

It was well into the afternoon when the service ended. There had been three sermons, much singing, and a continuance in prayer that must have left an impression upon many *knees*, at all events.

Chief among the worshippers was the Widow Brown; and when the service ended, she hung back, ostensibly to "shake hands" with the saints, in reality to offer a last invitation to the parson.

That pig! It had been on her heart all day. So indeed had the "yaller gal." She would not believe the preacher really meant to set her aside for "dat lill' mink in her raid petticoat."

"I 'ud jis' lack ter see her git up a chuch dinner by her own se'f, lack the parson's 'oman got ter do. Dis her mammy's dinner she done axed Brudder Hen'son ter eat. She can't cook, dat lill' Sis. She kin read en write, en dey-alls sey she gwine teach schul bimeby. Dat ain' gwine tek de place ob vittuls, sho' 'tain't. She too young fur dat man anyhows; why, he done berried one 'oman, en his ma keep'n ob his chillen fur him."

So consoling herself, the widow waited. At last he came out, hat in hand, too hurried to stop, and too much interested in a vision of blue and red disappearing up the path through the red-oak woods to notice the member of his flock standing alone beside the door. He merely glanced at the retreating colour, and set out at a brisk little run in the wake of "little Sis."

The Widow Brown watched him with

feelings of mingled emotion. He was fat and awkward.

"Ef he keep up dat gait he ain' gwine cross dat foot-log," she said; "en dat hussy yonder! Look at her! Done turn roun' en wait fur him. Look! look dar now!"

The parson had seen the girl stop and had increased his speed. He reached the foot-log all safe, and, without a moment's hesitation, started across, with the daring of an athlete.

Suddenly there was a swerve; one freshly washed foot "missed its hit;" there was a scramble, a reaching out of both hands, a loud shout of laughter from the widow, and something from the parson that sounded very like an oath, and then Parson Henderson struck the log — *a-straddle*. There *was* a low titter from neighbourhood of the red and blue, but the parson was blissfully ignorant of this.

Distinct enough, however, came the voice of the widow:

"Dar now! Dar now! *Ain'* yo glad God made yer forkid?"

The next moment he heard her singing, complacently pious as ever, as she went down the hill, where the visitors were spreading their dinners under the trees, to invite Lean Jim, aunt Winnie, and Zack, the water-witch, to help eat the pig and pound cake.

"En I'll meet Marse Jesus in de Glory,
Glory! Glory! Glory!"

She was still laughing over the preacher's mishap. She felt repaid for all her disappointment.

A Humble Advocate

SUNRISE in Jones's Cove. The great encompassing mountains stood solemn and weird and silent, capped with cloud and carpeted with everlasting green about their feet where the winter scarce finds an entrance into the well-screened cove slumbering among their rugged bases. Winding in and out among the gaps and crevices of the mountains, Big Pigeon River might be seen fighting its way to the beautiful French Broad.

The sun was peeping over the mountains, a great round, red eye of fire. The cove still lay in shadow and in silence. It might have been a dead world, indeed, for all sign there was of life, save for the one lone figure leaning upon the low palings of the rude gate in front of a little weather-beaten cabin standing at the Cove's head, just at the point where the road begins the ascent of the mountain.

As for the woman, she, too, might have been a part of the deadness, as she stood there with one small, knotted labour-marked hand clasping the paling, the elbow of the other arm resting upon it, her chin in her hand, and her bright, brown eyes fixed in melancholy musing upon the distant peaks of mountain rising above the valley. Only, looking well into the face, one could not fail to see the fire that still hid in the dark eyes, like a slumbering coal-bed that waited only the revivifying breath of excitement to fan it into a living glow.

Within the cabin a man lay sleeping upon a bed over which was thrown a quilt of many-coloured stripes. Two burly, calf-skin-covered feet depended floorward beneath the coverlet, and the arm, thrown with the careless abandon of the weary sleeper over the man's head, wore a sleeve of heavy gray jeans. Evidently he had thrown himself down to sleep without undressing. Upon a low trundle-bed at his side a boy of six years and a baby of one were sleeping. The woman at the gate was waiting for the man to awaken and eat his breakfast. It was already cooked, and was only waiting the pleasure of the liquor-sodden sleeper before the woman would bring it out from the skillets and pots ranged about the hearth, where she had set it to prevent the food getting "stone cole" before he should sober up sufficiently to call for it.

It was a dreary life, a cat-and-dog existence for her, the silent young watcher at the gate.

"Ef I could only get my own cornsent ter hold my tongue I reckin it would be better," she mused. "But pears like I'd be obleeged ter die sometimes ef I didn't try ter head Ike Cary off in some o' his doin's. 'Special when he begins ter hender the chillen; the pore little chillen as can't holp the'rse'ves in noways. I jest can't be still then; I be obleeged ter fight fur my chillen. Even the old hen out thar'll do that much fur her young; or the wil' varmints in the woods. I can't git my own cornsent ter be less keerful o' my young than the hens an' the b'ars an' sech."

It wasn't an unpleasant face that was lifted for a moment to the sunlight stealthily creeping over the mountains; it showed resolve, spirit, and a courage that death itself could not put to shame.

"I hev sarved that thar man in thar ten year, good an' faithful. I didn't come ter him em'ty-handed nuther. I had a hundred head o' cattle an a half a hundred acres o' valley lan'. An' I ware not accounted a bad-lookin' gal nuther, them days. But the law allowed as Ike Cary could keep my lan' an' truck more better nor me, an' so it ware his'n after I ware married ter him. Whose it air *now* I can't tell. The still-house got it o' Ike, I know *that* much. They-uns useter say, too, over yander in Elmiry whar I ware raised, that I ware right sprightly. Some allowed I'd make my mark ef I lived an' got my growth. I made it, yes; a mighty crosty kind o' mark it ware, when I married Ike. I ain't lacked in my sarvice none nuther, as I can see; an' what I hev got in exchange fur hit air blows and hard names. Lord, ef it ware not fur the chillen, the chillen that he air ruinin' of, I'd h'ist my heels an' take that thar road up the mount'n, an' travel away from here quicker'n yer could say 'Jack Roberson.' If it ware not fur the chillen I'd do it."

For the children; how many weary women have bowed their backs to their burdens, and taken their crosses again for the sake of the children, — the children, God-given to keep soul and body in harness if not in unison!

"You Josephine? Am I got ter wait all day fur a mouffull o' cole victuals? Or hev ye gone spang deef that ye can't hear noways, when I call ter yer? Hi God, ye air gitten too peart an' independent ter suit *my* fancy. Standin' thar sungazin', air ye? an' me a-waitin' fur my breakfus'. Gol darn ye, ef yer don't come in here an' fish out them victuals I'll fling the shovel at yer; else't this here brat as can't make out ter git itse'f wake like other folks."

She was in the cabin long enough before the man had completed his complaint, and was dishing up the breakfast. She paid no heed to his threats until he strode over to the trundle-bed where the baby was sleeping, the older child having risen when Cary called his wife to get his breakfast up.

"Stan' back from thar," she commanded. "You-uns jest let that thar chile be, Ike Cary."

Whether it was the glitter in the restless eyes, or whether he was too stupidly indifferent to carry out his threat, she neither knew nor cared ; with a low laugh of derision he drew his chair up to the table and began to eat his breakfast. The woman sat near, not eating, but waiting upon her husband, and the little boy, who scrambled up into a chair at her side and began calling for a dodger.

"I'd wash my face an' hands first ef I ware ye," said the mother. "It air plumb bad manners ter eat without washin'."

"Let him be," said Cary. "What be the use anyhow? They-uns'll be dirty ag'in 'ginst dinner-time. Eat yer breakfus', son ; pappy'll let ye."

"That ain't no way ter raise chillen," said Mrs. Cary. As she had so many times told herself, she couldn't get her own consent to hold her tongue where the children were concerned.

The man made no reply ; he was busy with the chicken she had broiled and set before him. When he had finished and pushed back his plate, he seemed in a better humour,—disposed to talk, indeed; though the talk always meant either an argument or a season of ridiculing the woman whom he regarded as his weaker half.

"Whar did you-uns stay las' night?" She put the question timidly, knowing from experience what the reply would be.

"Waal, now, Miss Master, whar do ye reckin?" said he. "I ware *somewhars*, that ought ter satisfy ye. But Lor, these women; they air obleeged ter know it all. Waal then, ef ye must know, I ware down to the Forge; an' some o' the candidates ware thar, an' we had all the liquor we could carry, an' more. An' they-uns ware powerful anxious ter git my vote, too, I can tell ye. Offered me—"

She bent her small, bright eyes upon him a moment, then made a gesture as of waving him off:

"Ef you-uns hev been a-takin' of bribes

an' sech, Ike Cary, *I* don't want ter know it."

"Jest as ye please, jest as ye please. But stir yer stumps an' get the cuckleburrers out'n that thar brat's head. I aims ter fetch him ter town with me ter-day."

"He ain't fit ter go," she replied. "He ware ailin' all night. I gin him paregoric twicet endurin' o' the night."

"He's a-goin' jest the same," said Cary. "An' ef you-uns wants ter sen' him off lookin' like the witches hev had him, *I* ain't keerin'. He's my chile, I reckin, an' I aims ter do ez I please with him. Git up, son, an' git yer hat. Pappy's gwine let ye ride behin' him down ter S'vierville ter-day."

Rebellion was useless; she had tried it too often not to know. She smoothed out the tangled yellow hair, and washed the face that shone again with the anticipation of a ride to the county-seat. And when the man extended a leg and reached his hand to the boy to drag him up to the saddle behind him, she stood at the gate and "saw them off" with the best grace she could summon.

"Keep a holt on the tail of yer pappy's coat, son," she admonished the smiling youngster. "An' Ike, you-uns hol' on ter Benny; he ain't use ter ridin' behin', an' he'll slip off inter Pigeon River or somers, an' git hisse'f drowned, ef ye ain't keerful of him."

"Lord, Lord, listen at the critter," said Ike. "*Air* he my chile or not? That's what I'd like ter know."

As they rode away she stood watching them through eyes in which anger had dried the tears that might otherwise have come to her relief.

"Ter hear that man talk, anybody would think as it air all his chile, an' that he never had no mammy; leastways that she got no more ter say in the raisin' of him than ef she ware a stick. Women air no better than that nohows, I'm a-thinkin'.

The laws o' this kentry gins a man the right ter hol' the lash, an' he hol's it.

"The laws; *I say!* A pretty thing the laws o' this land air, a-settin' by an' seein' chillen bein' kerried ter thar death, an' allowun' as it air all right becase the father hev a right ter do as he likes with his own chillen. An' whar air the laws fur the woman, I say? Why don't they let the women he'p make 'em ef they-uns hev got ter live up ter 'em? That's what *I* want er know. Lor, but wouldn't I like ter he'p make the laws fur this country; an' wouldn't I jest give the women a showin' ter live, though? *Wouldn't I?*"

She had never heard of woman suffrage in her life. She only knew that she had felt the lack of the law's protection, and recognised in a vague way that the man who governs the woman is not competent to make impartial laws for her. The thought had come to her often before; but this morning she was so impressed with it that she did not hear a step coming along the path, the nigh cut down the mountain. She had unconsciously given voice to her thought, not knowing that she had an audience: "Set a passel o' men ter make laws fur the women they expec' ter own! Shucks! Like ter make good uns, I reckin."

A man stood at the foot of the path; he had heard every word of the foolish complaining.

"Never you min' 'bout that, Mis' Cary," said he. "Thar's better days a comin' fur the women-folks, I shouldn't wonder. I heeard las' week whenst I ware down ter Knoxville ter witness fur Si Odem, as ware indicted fur stealin' of a horse—Si never took the horse no more'n you did, an' I went down ter witness as he ware over ter my house the very day he ware 'cused o' stealin' the cussed critter over in Knox County. I tol' the jury that, but they-uns 'peared not ter take my word somehows, an' Si ware sent ter the penitentiary fur ten year. But I heeard, whiles't I ware thar witnessin' fur Si, as how the women-folks ware goin' ter be let ter vote befo' mighty long. I went ter one o' the'r meetin's whiles't I ware thar. 'Tware helt in a tent; an' how them women did talk about the men ware a scan'le, Mis' Cary. Lord, Lord, ef the women don't beat my time! Wantin' ter be let ter vote, same as men! First thing ye an' me knows, Mis' Cary, they'll be axin' ter be let wear pantaloons, and galluses, an' sech. *Then* who air ter cook breakfus', I'd like ter know? Thar ain't no tellin' what the women o' Tennessee won't be a-wantin' of next."

She was listening with wide, dilated eyes; her heart was beating like a hammer.

"Air it true that they ull be let ter vote? Air that a true word, Jeff Bynum?"

"Wall, now, Mis' Cary, hit ain't quite settled yit," said Jeff. "This air the shape they-uns hev got inter. The women-folks they-uns allows thar be lots o' meanness kerried on in Tennessee, an' they let on as how if they-uns be let ter vote they ull send good men ter the legislatur' — men as won't take bribes, an' will put down liquor, an' wipe out wife-beatin', an' mebbe kill the Ole Scratch hisse'f, fur all anybody knows."

There was a flash of the dark eyes, a quiver of the strong lips that should have had a girlish laugh upon them, instead of that weary woman-look they wore.

"Did the women o' Knoxville say that air?" Her face flushed with the pride she felt in them; she could have fallen at their feet in very worship.

"The women o' Knox an' Hamilton, an' some from as fur as Shelby hitse'f," said Bynum. "I declar' ter goodness, Mis' Cary, it ware a plumb caution the way they-uns talked. One got up an' allowed as she wanted ter vote ter holp *de*velop a *mo*ralerty in *gov'mint*. I wondered what the fool allowed she ware talkin' 'bout. An' another one wanted ter vote becase she didn't want ter be classed with luner*tics*, she said. Another one didn't want ter be put with *idjits*, though *I* could see mighty plain as she ware one, p'int blank. An' one ware ag'in bein' put down in the law with crimernals an' furriners, an' said she wanted a ekal right ter her own chillen. 'Women's rights' they-uns called it. Lord, Lord, my wife gits all the rights she air entitled to in *this* worl'; all her entitlemints an' more, ef the truth ware knowed. She hev got the right ter milk the cow, an' cook the victuals, ter rise up an' ter set down. What more mortal critter air wantin' of air too much fur Jeff Bynum ter say."

He waited for her to agree with him, but she was silent. She was no longer listening; she was thinking of those brave women in Knoxville. How her soul went out to them! The slumbering fires of her nature awoke and made response to their effort, those brave few fighting, contesting every inch of the road, their way to freedom, — their way, and the way of all womanhood. She was with them as surely as though she had been in their meetings, been one of them. She recognised the need; her heart responded to the justice of their claims. She would have footed it all the way to Knoxville, gladly, just to have told them how she thanked them for their effort.

The visitor saw the keen interest in the young face, and, not unwilling to make himself interesting, proceeded to talk.

"I tell ye now, Mis' Cary," said he, "I be goin' down ter fed'ral court nex' month, ter witness fur Abe Stores, as air indicted fur illicit distillin'; an' I'll keep my ears pricked, an' ef I heear any more about this here thing o' the women votin' I'll let ye know. It air a mighty fine subject now, shore. They-uns allowed the law let ever' created critter have a sesso except lunertics, an' convic's, an' idjits, an' furriners, an' babies, *an'* women.

But shucks, says I. Whar's the good o' votin'? Hit ain't henderin' the workin's o' Satan, as *I* can see. He air jest as lively ter-day as befo' the women axed ter be let ter vote, Mis' Cary."

She made no reply, and glancing at her face, he saw that she was not thinking of him. Half aggrieved, he turned away.

"Waal, I must be a-mosin'," said he.

The words recalled her wandering senses; she remembered, even in her wonder over the strange knowledge that had come to her, the courtesy due a visitor.

"Won't you-uns come in an' git a bite o' breakfus'?" she said. "Hit ain't cole yet, though Ike hev et his an' gone."

"Naw'm, I must be a-mosin' on; I ware at a coon hunt las' night, an' the ole 'oman she'll be a-lookin' fur me ter be in time fur breakfus'. Good day, Mis' Cary. I'll be shore ter let ye know 'bout the votin' whenst I come back from witnessin' fur Abe."

He was laughing silently as he went

down the sun-flooded road with the loitering step of the all-night reveller.

"Lord, now, wouldn't she cut a figger at the polls? An' wouldn't the boys jest etarnally laugh Ike out'n the Cove ef his wife ware ter take ter votin' an' sech? But ef she ware ter take a notion ter it, all S'vier County couldn't stop her, she air that heady an' high-strung."

Ike, meanwhile, was pursuing his way as calmly unconcerned as though he had the world at his feet. When he reached his store, early as it was, he saw the usual crowd of loafers congregated, waiting for him to open up for the day.

He tossed the key into the midst of them as he rode past, half turning in the saddle to call out to them:

"Open the darned thing, some of ye. An' some of ye shut the door ter-night, 'g'inst varmints an' sech. Holp yerse'ves ter barter an' sech, an' leave yer truck somers in thar. I'm goin' down ter S'vierville ter lay in some goods, mebbe.

Bob Bolton, air that yer snaggletooth countenance over thar? Whar air that root o' rattlesnake's-master you-uns ware gwine ter fetch ter trade fur some sorghum so brisk? Mis' Durham she jest doctored herse'f on corn whiskey whiles't she ware waitin' on the rattlesnake's-master, that thar time she got herse'f bit. Got t'arin' drunk, — tight as the devul; killed the p'ison, howsomever. But fetch it 'long, fetch it 'long; thar's a plentier more folks fur the rattlers ter cut the'r teeth on exceptin' o' ole Mis' Durham. Good day, folkses. Walk in an' make yerse'ves ter home. An' ef so be thar's any 'mongst ye not hones' enough ter charge up what he gits, why, let him steal it, he's welcome. Ef he'd ruther be a rogue as ter be a hones' man, he hev got my cornsent ter so be."

The summer waned, the days grew shorter; then came the light frost, and autumn, gaily resplendent, settled upon the hills. The trees were a rustling burden of scarlet and gold and amethyst. Then came the hoarfrost, and vegetation died like a newly born joy in the heart of a woman. The scarlet and gold gave place to ashes and dust; denuded nature's heart lay bare. Then came the rains, November, and the election. Mrs. Cary had heard nothing from Bynum; indeed she had not expected to hear. She had heard enough to awaken her heart to the great possibilities that lay buried in the bosom of that mysterious future that might dawn *sometime* for the women of Tennessee.

She felt sometimes that, had fate dealt her a different lot, she might indeed have been one of them, — one of the *helpers* in the great cause that was already dear to her. Yet, "I dunno, nuther," she would tell herself when this thought was in her heart. "I dunno; mebbe I wouldn't know so well what the need air ef I hadn't 'a' felt it as I hev done."

Experience, mighty mother of despair,

had taught her what it was to be a slave to man's meanness and ignorance. A slave,—she remembered that one of the Knoxville women had said she wanted the ballot because she wanted her liberty. The thought had taken possession of her, that humble woman, lost among the hills of Tennessee, lost to everything but ignorance and despair. Liberty; why, it was liberty that reared Bunker Hill, made America,—liberty, the foundation and chief corner-stone of the very government itself; the palladium of all peace; the base of the triangle upon which is founded all brotherly love and faith and hope. And woman was the only one of God's creatures to whom it was denied. But it would come,—it must; the mighty minds of earth would take hold some day and knock off her shackles and set her free.

The idea possessed her; she could talk of nothing else. Afternoons when Ike would be away at the store, or off on a drunken bout somewhere, she would take the children and go off to some of the neighbour women's houses and talk to them about it. But she got little sympathy; they called her "cracked," after awhile, and some wondered why Ike Cary didn't make her "stop sech etarnal foolishness."

She had never attempted to talk to Ike about it but once. It was one evening when he came home from Pigeon Forge in high glee because of a speech he had heard down there in favour of his chosen candidate for the State legislature.

"Did ye hear anything o' the women bein' let ter vote, whiles't ye ware down ter the Forge?"

She had put the question timidly; perhaps that was why it angered him.

"Listen at the fool," said he. "The idee o' women votin'! What do women know about the laws o' the land? I declar ter God, Josephine, ef you-uns ain't gittin' foolisher an' foolisher ever' day ye lives. Ye ain't got as much gumption as that thar chile thar this minute. Now, I want ter tell ye as I hev heard enough 'bout that thar fool notion you-uns hev took up. I air not goin' ter be laughed plumb out'n the State o' Tennessee, ef I *know* it."

The next day she took her baby under her arm and went to pay a little visit at the house of her neighbour. It was near the time of the election; the men were going to and from the county-seat every day. She might learn something of the great question that had so agitated her mind. But the woman did not once broach the subject, and it was not until she was leaving that Mrs. Cary herself mustered courage sufficient to ask about it.

"De Lor', Mis' Cary," was the reply, "ye an' me better stay at home an' 'ten' ter the chillen an' the men-folks, an' leave votin' an' law-makin' to them as the Lord meant ter take charge o' it. Naw'm, I air not lookin' ter vote. My ole man allows as a woman's place air ter milk the cow an' cook the victuals an' 'ten' 'ter the men-folks, — *ef* they-uns hev got any men-folks ter 'ten' ter; them as haven't may go votin', *I* say, an' the Lord hev mercy on the'r souls."

And as Mrs. Cary walked homeward in the gray twilight, the woman regarded her from the doorstep with a curiously pitying expression.

"Josephine Cary air in an' about *deranged*," said she. "She hev took ter vagrantin' roun' the mount'n till folks air talkin' mightily about her. An' they do say as she talks polertics same as a man. Land o' Moses! what air this worl' a-comin' ter, *I* say."

Mrs. Cary had not made herself obnoxious, however, even to the men. She *would* talk politics; they found that hard to forgive, 'tis true, because she didn't always agree with them; but as to the question of the women voting, the men made light of that, and because it was something so entirely novel and unlikely, they forgave her that "bit o' gol-darned foolishness." But many were the jokes cast at Ike on her account; her shoulders bore the marks of them. Ike had his own ideas as to the proper means of putting a stop to the ridicule she excited.

The morning of the election dawned at last, clear, cool, a forerunner of the nearing winter. The voting was done in the old way, so long customary among the mountains, and Ike's store was utilised as a precinct.

Josephine had settled it in her own mind that she would go to the poll, merely as a matter of interest. There could be no harm in her going; it was at her husband's store, and other women would be coming in to trade before the day was over. Ike had taken the older boy with him early in the morning. It was nine o'clock before Josephine set a pot of pumpkin to boil, and, gathering the baby under her arm, set off up the mountain.

A stranger, a man from one of the valley towns, was seated near the election boxes, leaning back against the low, rough counter. He glanced up when Josephine entered, to wonder at the brightness of the small, dark eyes regarding him from beneath the black sunbonnet. Her entrance was the signal for the settlement jokers to begin; the forms of greeting were varied:

"Come ter vote, Mis' Cary?" asked one.

"Lor, Mis' Cary, the women ain't let ter vote yit."

"You-uns air jest ninety-nine year ahead o' the time, Mis' Cary."

"Fetch the baby 'long ter vote, too, Mis' Cary? Ye know ef the law allows the woman it ought ter allow the baby ter vote, too. Women an' babies air disbarred; the law disbars ye both; mebbe it'll admit ye both by and by."

The woman shifted her baby to the other hip, and regarded her teasers silently for a moment; she was like some wild creature of the forest at bay, as she turned upon them, with the only weapon at her command, her tongue:

"Yes," said she, "the law air ekal ter that; the laws o' Tennessee air ekal ter 'most anything. But" — she paused, set the baby upon the counter, and put into its hand the end of the ball of twine used for tying bundles, then slowly lifted her hand — "some o' you-uns'll live ter see the women o' the land cast'n' o' the'r votes yet. Let them as laugh look ter it."

The prophecy fell with strange force from the narrow, strong lips. They regarded her with a kind of awe for a moment, the boldest among them forgetting to sneer.

It was at this moment that Ike, who had been in the rear of the house filling a quart bottle with kerosene for a customer, came forward, the bottle in his hand. He glanced a moment at the silent, gaping crowd, with their gaze fixed upon the woman who had lifted her voice in prophecy. His swarthy face grew livid; without a second's hesitation he lifted his arm and hurled the bottle with all his strength at her head. It crashed past her and went to pieces in a thousand fragments upon the wall behind her. The woman never flinched.

"What air ye doin' here?" demanded the angry husband. "Didn't I tell ye ter stay at home whar ye b'longed, ye dad-burned hell-cat? Comin' here ter make a fool o' yerse'f befo' a passel o' fools as ain't got no more sense than to laugh at ye! Lemme git at ye; I'll see ef—"

The group separated to make way for him as the half-drunken man strode past them; he carried a rawhide whip that he had jerked from the hand of one of the men who had driven a yoke of oxen to the store. The woman moved aside, not to dodge the blow, but to shield the child playing with the twine-cord upon the counter. One sharp, cutting blow descended upon the thin, stooped shoulders, but before he could lift the whip for a second the strange man leaning against the counter sprang to his feet and seized his arm.

"Don't you do that again," he commanded. "Don't you dare to strike that woman again, you damned brute, you. I mean what I say; no man shall strike a woman where I am, not if I have to hang for it. Drop that lash, you coward, and get back to your oil-tubs. A pretty thing, you, to call yourself a man! Men,"—he turned to the wonder-stricken crowd about the door,—"you see for yourselves how the laws of the State need mending. If I go to the legislature from this county the very first bill I shall introduce will be one to make wife-beating a felony in the State of Tennessee. Now you may elect me on that ticket or not, just as you choose."

A few minutes later he stood outside watching for Josephine to come down the rude steps, preparatory to going home.

"Why did you come here, my good woman?" he said, wishing to offer some kind of help to the poor creature. "Why did you come here? See what you have brought upon yourself."

He pointed to a blood-stain upon her shoulder where the rawhide had cut through to the skin. She glanced at the stain and then at him. Something in his voice appealed to her; this was her opportunity to say a word, to help along the women of Knoxville.

"I am not keerin' fur that," said she; "what I'm keering for air my liberty; I want my liberty. 'Pears like the women air the only created critters as hev not got the'r freedom in this worl'."

Instinctively there recurred to him a scene he had witnessed in his youth: a slave was being beaten for running away; he was bound with thongs, and another slave was made to ply the lash; it was of rawhide also, and there was blood upon the slave's shoulders. He received his punishment without a groan; but the next day he ran away again, and was found dead along the roadside *en route* to liberty. And this woman of Tennessee, with her bruised and burdened back, demanded hers.

"Ay, God, and she shall have it," he told himself as he galloped home through the midnight; "she shall have it, if word of mine can avail to help along her cause. Liberty? Why, men have died for liberty; they have died to give the gracious boon to other men. Yet for woman, —who has thought of *her?*"

The words of the mountain woman throbbed in his thoughts: "'Pears like woman air the only created critter as ain't got her freedom."

He saw again the gaping crowd, the sneering faces, the uplifted lash. Again in his ears was sounding the one word of defence offered: "Some o' you-uns'll live ter see the women o' the land castin' o' the'r votes yet."

Prophetic words, and big with meaning!

Tappine

LOVE that is born in the heart of a woman,—what a curious thing it is! It comes uncalled, unsought, and often unwanted. And oh, the ravages it makes! Now, there was Tappine,—who ever would have looked for love like that in the heart of a little mountain maiden? But then, love, like God, is no respecter of persons. Which is natural too, since God and love are one.

It was morning at Beersheba; every cedar and pine astir with the good winds that sweep across the mountain, making the great plateau indeed a health-crown to the brave old Cumberlands.

Already the summer was astir, the

guests arriving. The big hotel would soon open its doors to the nature-loving few who still haunt the beautiful stillnesses of Beersheba.

Over among the cottages, picturesque log palaces indeed, might be seen one set apart from the rest somewhat. Larger, handsomer, furnished with all the richness of a Southern ease-lover. The windows stood wide open, a banner of lace waving from each. In the piazza a hammock of gay colours was swinging, and in the hammock the young Mrs. Ennerly lay curled up among her silken pillows. She held a book, but Mrs. Ennerly was not reading. Her thoughts were far away among the purple distances of another mountain, where, in the first fond flush of girlhood, she had registered her one romance, her "one folly," she sometimes told herself; though she always told herself this with a sigh, as though the folly might have had its tender side, no less than its foolish.

Her one romance; life has but one romance, indeed; say what we may, do what we please to disprove it, there is, deep down in every heart, but the one truly warm spot upon which the soul will fondly fix itself at last, when youth and dreaming shall have given place to memory.

The lady in the hammock was thinking of *her* one bright spot, where the winds soughed softly in the autumn-time, and the brown leaves drifted down among the hollows of a hundred old graves, over on that other mountain where her poor little romance had begun and ended all in one bright, brief autumn.

Suddenly the dreamer lifted herself upon an elbow to listen; through the open door of the dining-room the voice of her husband's mother came, softly modulated, after the manner of well-bred gentlewomen, and in striking contrast with the joyously untrained voice of the visitor, with whom the lady was conversing.

"Yes, we are back early this year," the elder Mrs. Ennerly was saying. "Alice was really homesick for the mountain, and so we ran off before the season was fairly open. My son will not come for awhile, and then for just a little time; he is busy, always busy; so that we shall be quite alone, we two. How is your grandmother, this summer?" The younger Mrs. Ennerly leaned forward in the hammock:

"Mother! Oh, mother! Send Tappine to me."

Tappine did not wait to be sent; in another moment she stood framed by the dark doorway, a picture that had caught the artistic eye of the city woman many a previous summer. A slight, frail figure, full of lissome grace, and of the innocent ease that belies the knowledge of posing. She wore a gown of dark blue cotton that brought out with peculiar emphasis the fair pinkish complexion, always found among the very young girls of the mountains, and the bright, loose waves of hair that fell about the slight, evenly sloped shoulders.

Her eyes were blue, darkly, richly blue, with lashes that fell like a fringe of lace upon the softly babyish cheek. Yet despite her youth, and the pink and white of the childlike complexion, there was that about her, in the flash of the eye, the curve of the thin, well-cut lip, that bore evidence of strength, which might, under stress of necessity, leap into life.

The blue eyes danced with undisguised delight as they rested upon the figure in the hammock. Mrs. Ennerly extended a jewelled hand: "Tappine, I had begun to believe you had really forgotten that I was here."

There was that in the voice, that tone of real pleasure, that caused the older woman, listening, to wonder again, as she had so many times wondered, at the strange affection that had sprung up between these two whom fate had seemingly set as far apart as fate well could do. She had told herself more than once that it was the child's beauty — for Tappine was undeniably pretty — and a sort of sympathy for her surroundings that had won the affection of her daughter-in-law. Again she had told herself that it was lack of company that had brought her daughter to seek the girl for a companion in her tramps through the woods. But as the season advanced and there was *no* lack of company, had she chosen to have it, and the lady still chose Tappine in preference to any of the visitors that thronged the hotel, the good woman ceased to wonder, and accepted the odd friendship as one of her daughter's freaks, that she would tire of by and by.

As for Tappine, she recognised nothing odd in the friendship; the mountaineer does not look for distinctions, does not see them. The girl stood framed in by the old dark door until the lady in the hammock extended her hand. At that she stepped quickly forward and took the soft bejewelled hand between her own sun-browned palms.

"I say 'forgot,'" she laughed; "as though I ain't been honin' ter git here ever sence the stage horn blowed fur Beersheby yistiddy. But granny took a suddint notion ter be spinnin' an' thar ware no wool for bats in the house, so I ware obleeged ter go over ter Alt'mont after some. Becase when granny goes to spinnin' — well! she air a-goin', that's all. I rid like a Injun all the way, in hopes ter git back in time ter come over here las' night. But when I got home granny had a mis'ry in her side an' wouldn't be. lef' alone, lest she might die an nobody ever know it. This mornin'—"

Tappine's pretty face broke into dimples, which the handsome lady was quick to interpret:

"This morning you came, anyhow? In defiance of 'bats' and 'mis'ries;' is that it? Well, draw up that footstool there, and tell me all about yourself. How is Ben? And are there any new flirtations? And is Jeff behaving himself after his usual bearish fashion? Tappine, you are blushing; your pink ears tell me so."

In the blue eyes something glittered with suspicious brightness before the fringed lids veiled their secret.

"Now, Mis' En'ly," the slow voice was lifted in protest, "you know Jeff air jest allers a-makin' believe he air mad about the boys, Ben Cary an' them, a-comin' ter see me. Las' week he actually got fightin' mad with Nate Beene fur axin' of me ter dance with him at the infare down in Dark Holler, as old Mis' Beene give ter her daughter Judy, as got married. Nate's mail-carrier acrost the mount'n, you know. Well, them two had a tolerable tussle, an' Nate he jest lit in an' whipped Jeff plumb good fashion. I liked ter 'a' kilt myse'f laughin', it ware so comical, an' so onexpected to Jeff, who air mostly give ter doin' the whippin' his own se'f. An' Jeff he got that mad he sent Nate word he'd meet him in the Hollow some o' these days an' wallop him until his folks couldn't tell which ware man and which ware mail-sack. An' Jeff air good to do it, *ef* he *can;* you rickerlict Jeff can be toler'ble catawampus in his temper now'n then."

"I recollect that he never was worth one good, honest thought from you, Tappine," was the reply; "and I had hoped that you would have found it out for yourself by this time, and would have been ready to give your heart to good, honest Ben, who really loves you. As for Jeff, he is just a cross-grained, jealous, ne'er-do-well — "

The girl lifted a silencing finger.

"Now, Mis' En'ly, you never would give Jeff jestice. He's a sight better than you think, an' I shouldn't wonder ef I ware ter blame fur most of we-uns' little fracases anyhows. You-uns can't jedge him like me as have lived nigh him allers."

"But —"

The argument was promptly brought to an end by a dexterous move on Tappine's part.

"Mis' En'ly," said she, "the mount'n air jest full o' laurel, an' the trailin' arbutus ain't nigh all gone. I allowed maybe you'uns 'ud like ter take a walk."

Evidently the mountain girl understood the weaknesses of her city friend, and indeed she well might, since she had trailed the mountain with the great lady since a little girl in short frocks, hunting for the forest treasures, first of flowers, later of nuts and the bright leaves of the autumn. Tappine had not misjudged the fascination of the familiar paths. In a short time Mrs. Ennerly had exchanged her house gown for a short, dark walking-dress, and was deep in the heart of the woods with Tappine.

"We will go down the Backbone and take a peep into Dark Hollow," said the lady, "and then we will climb back up the bluff and go over to Ben's house and give the order for the summer wood. Is that your grandmother calling, Tappine?"

They were passing a little low, picturesque cabin, half hidden under a mass of greening vines, gourds, and jack beans. An old woman stood in the door, shading her eyes with her gaunt, brown hand and calling shrilly to the girl too absorbed in her companion to hear the querulous, well-known voice.

"Tappiny! Tappiny, I say! Thar ain't no meal in the barr'l; some-un'll be obleeged ter go ter mill afore long."

Tappiny! Was it possible to twist that name, with its own pretty music, into such a hideous sound? Tappiny! The girl herself rebelled.

"Pears like," she declared, when, after a friendly word to the old woman, the two passed on, "pears like I could put up with granny's tormentin's a sight better ef she would call me 'Tappine,' or else 'Teen,' like Jeff an' the rest calls me. I just hate that thar '*Tappiny.*' Hush! some un's comin' down the Backbone, Mis' En'ly."

They stood upon that little narrow steep, with its curious distortions and contortions, long and steep and dangerous, rising like a blank wall, with rigid, sharp sides, between the two valleys, to which the mountaineers have given the name of Backbone. On one hand lay the mythical lowland known as the "Gulch," on the other, deep down, and full of awesome glooms, and rank, even at midday, with the shadows, nestled the Hollow, Dark Hollow indeed, as the mountaineers had named it. What a spot for a suicide; what a dangerous, deadly spot for a leap into eternity, and what a spot for a horse travelling adown that steep incline with the one narrow broken path before, and certain death on either side in case of a misstep, or a slip over the ragged, rock-ribbed steep!

The horseman coming down the steep at that moment had evidently no fear of the Backbone; the two women crowded close to the bluff's edge as the sound of hoof-beats, uneven, careless, indifferent alike of danger or of strangers, came nearer and nearer. A moment more, and the horse, a gallant gray, trotted leisurely into the open highway. The rider was a young man, stalwart and straight as an Indian. He sat his steed, too, with something of the easy abandon of the man of the plains. He wore neither coat nor vest, and his feet and lower limbs were encased in long leathern riding-boots as a precaution against the mountain streams through which his route would carry him. For the rider was neither more nor less than Jeff Mabry, the ne'er-do-well of the neighbourhood, who had been so fortunate as to win the heart of Tappine, the mountain belle.

Jeff was going hunting, evidently, for a rifle was slung across the saddle bow, and a cartridge-belt was tightly buckled about his waist. As the familiar, graceful figure became silhouetted against the bright blue of the sky that seemed to almost rim the dangerous steep, a flush mounted to the girl's cheek. Instantly Tappine was the coquette, ready to almost repudiate the acquaintance with the man whose praises her nimble tongue had but a moment before delighted to sound. As the gray horse trotted nearer, the attitude of the girl changed, the scarlet of the pretty face gave place to a half pallor; the coquetry was lost in the anxiety with which she awaited the action of her capricious lover.

Was he still jealous? Tappine was but human, after all, and so long as Jeff allowed this flame of his adoration to blaze before her eyes, just so long was she ready to add fuel to its fire.

But to-day she felt keenly anxious that

he should be friendly, should appear well in the eyes of the woman who had so often, and so strongly, condemned him.

But a glance at the sullen, boyish face convinced her that her hopes were doomed to their usual disappointment. She drew farther back, to the very edge of the bluff, as he passed her with a scowl and a careless " Howdy, Teen," together with a sullen little nod at her companion, whom he at once recognised as " the fine lady from the valley as Teen have took up with."

There were tears in Tappine's eyes when the gray horse trotted out of sight down the Backbone. Mrs. Ennerly laughed softly:

" Is he jealous of me, Tappine ? " she asked. " Is he afraid I shall run away with you some day, — spirit you off the mountain, and so away from his uncanny influence ? Or is it just the ugly, bearish nature of the man that renders him so uncivilised ? Take care, Tappine, it isn't a pretty promise you are holding out to your life, in consenting to marry Jeff Mabry."

"Now, Mrs. En'ly," the girl immediately assumed the defensive again; "you-uns mustn't lay it up ag'inst Jeff fur not speakin' more friendly. He air just mad at me, an' he done that ter spite me. He ain't got any grudge ag'inst you-uns."

The lady stopped and placed a hand upon the girl's arm, firmly: "Tappine," said she, "I am a woman of the world, and I know men as well as women. The man who treats his sweetheart whom he hopes to win, as that boy treats you, will be to the wife he has *won*, a brute. I shouldn't allow him to trifle with me a moment longer, were I you, and I shouldn't love him either, were I in your place."

The girl tossed her bright head and broke into a laugh, a loud ringing laugh, which, despite the music of it, was lacking in that more delightful quality, mirth.

"Now, Mis' En'ly," said she, "jest ter

listen at you-uns! A woman can't holp who she loves, and she can't allers love as she knows ter be wise an' right. Why, she might tell herse'f she ware a fool till she drapped dead, an' still go right on lovin' foolish, plumb inter eternity. That's woman natur, I know *that* much, Mis' En'ly, an' I ain't no 'woman of the world' neither, an' I don't know so pow'ful much about men, but I know that much o' women. They can't allers love ter suit the'rse'ves, an' mighty seldom ter suit the balance o' the world."

The worldly-wise woman was silent. "Women can't always love to suit themselves." She had no philosophy with which to argue the too sad truth of the mountain girl's dearly acquired wisdom.

Farther down the mountain, where the great distortion inclines to the level again, the narrow road separated into two forks, one leading down into the dismal fastness of Dark Hollow, the other sloping gently into a little tilled enclosure, in the centre of which stood a cabin of new-hewn logs. The sunshine lay in bright, golden patches upon the doorsteps, and full in the midst of the brightness a man was sitting, busily at work upon some diminutive bit of carpentry that was engaging the attention of two children pressing as close to the knees of the young carpenter as the brisk playing of a handsaw would permit. It was a pleasant face, beaming with honest and surprised delight, that was lifted in response to Mrs. Ennerly's call. He rose at once and strode briskly forward, leaving his unfinished work for the youngsters to enjoy after their own ideas.

"Waal, now, if this air not a surprise, I'll be blessed!" he exclaimed, with the unaffected sincerity of the mountaineer, who recognises distinctions neither of class nor of wealth. "Howdy-do, Mis' En'ly, an' Teen too; waal, waal, waal. I hope you-uns air well, Mis' En'ly. No'm, I ain't fitten ter shake hands; the chillen got after me ter make 'em a wagin; they're my sister Emily's chillen, an' I have been a-tinkerin' on that wagin till my hands air that rough an' splintery they ain't fitten to be shook. But I'm monstrous glad to see you back to Beersheby, I sholy am. I heeard night befo' last you-uns ware on the way, an' I laid off in my mind ter go by ter-night an' ax Teen to go over thar with me, an' find out ef you wanted the wood same as common. I flung one load over anyhows, ter begin on. I reckin it's all right. I knowed Teen would be willin' ter go, because Teen ain't never been knowed ter refuse ter go ter Beersheby yit, after it air known you-uns' house air open."

He laughed and looked at the girl, waiting for her to admit the pleasant charge. But Tappine was not listening. Her glance was fixed upon the Hollow, with its deep and echoless shadows, its mysterious glooms and mist-shrouded paths into which her lover had ridden away with a careless word and an angry heart. "Women can't love to suit themselves." Alas! poor Tappine, hers had been a wisdom born of that most bitter teacher, experience.

It was not till Ben put his hint into a plain request that Tappine came back to a realisation of what he was saying.

"Will you-uns walk over to Beersheby ter-night, Teen? I want ter be sartain Mis' En'ly found the house all right, as it ware lef' ter my care."

Tappine hesitated; she had that moment resolved that she would leave off teasing Jeff by her flirtations, and meet the sensitive, jealous lover upon his own terms. Jeff was reasonable enough, she considered, when she didn't "vex him with her foolishness." Which meant that Jeff was so wholly *unreasonable* as to demand the entire allegiance of his sweetheart. Ben was waiting for her answer, however, and Mrs. Ennerly was watching. She shook off her sudden, unspoken subjection, and replied with careless indifference:

"Yes, I can go, I reckin, ef my granny don't need me."

It was a week later that Mrs. Ennerly came over to the cabin to challenge the girl for a tramp through the forest. Tappine was leaning upon the low palings of the gate, her long, loose hair floating lightly in the brisk breeze of the mountain summer, her bare, brown arms crossed upon the wooden palings, her eyes following the fast receding outlines of a horse and rider disappearing down the road in the mist of the morning.

Something bright — and bitter — shone in the blue eyes for a moment, and trickled slowly down, to fall unchallenged upon the bare, brown arms. The instant horse and rider disappeared, the bright head of the watcher dropped upon the folded arms, and Tappine burst into tears.

"Tappine! Tappine!" It was the soft voice of the well-bred "woman of the world," who "understood men," and who understood so poorly the tender, human heart of woman.

"Tappine, what a little goose you are. Leave off your crying and come away to the woods with me. Is it another quarrel, or is it that granny's demands are too many this morning?"

Tappine lifted her head a moment and pointed down the long, zigzag road to the Backbone.

"It's all over for true this time," said she. "Yonder goes Jeff, ridin' away down the mountain, an' ridin' out o' my life, fur ever. He got mad becase Ben fetched me over ter you-uns' house last week, an' he allowed — oh, Mis' En'ly, he allowed as how I might — go — to — the — devil."

"Tappiny! You Tappiny, I say!" The shrill voice of the old grandmother came from the cabin door. "The dinner's ter bile, Tappiny; stir yer stumps, chile, stir yer stumps."

Clearly there could be no walk that day. Mrs. Ennerly said good-bye, and Tappine took her sore little heart into the old cabin, and set about her humble task of preparing the midday meal. And all day the sunshine fell in golden patches about the cabin door, shooting long, shimmering rays far into the room, as though to woo her from her grief. But Tappine did not see the brightness. For her there were only shadows, and premonitions of evil about to fall upon the little life that had been scarcely more than a bird's light life, flitting in and out among the shine and shades of the mountain.

Ben dropped in after dinner to tell her of the great times they were to have at a protracted meeting near by, and to ask her to go "along of him."

But Tappine sighed, and allowed she couldn't go, there was so much to do at home. So poor Ben said good-bye long before he was ready to go, because he saw that Tappine was not listening to him, or thinking of him in the least. But at sunset Ben came galloping back on his fiery brown mare, and, throwing the bridle-reins over the little low fence paling, which the gallant little mare must have long since learned to regard as her proper hitching-place, went dashing into the cabin where Tappine sat at her spinning-wheel, with such a tale of horror upon his lips as sent the hot blood freezing back to the girl's heart while she listened. And he had scarcely finished his story before Tappine was speeding away across the mountain to Beersheba, her hair damp with the evening dews, her lips white and dry, her throat aching with the strange, wild news she carried. She burst into the little sitting-room, where Mrs. Ennerly, sitting among the twilight glooms, busy with her thoughts and fancies, rose impulsively at the first sound of the girl's voice, hoarse and broken as she had never heard it.

"Mis' En'ly! Oh, Mis' En'ly, he air gone. Jeff air gone; he have kilt Nate

Beene, the mail rider, an' have run away, an' they air trackin' of him with dogs —"

She fell forward into the extended arms of the strange, beautiful woman, in whose heart the innocent, warm-souled girl of the hills had made for herself a place.

Later the story was told again, by Ben, while Tappine lay among the silken pillows of Mrs. Ennerly's own couch; and listening, Tappine's were not the only tears shed for sorrow's sake.

They had found the mail-carrier where the river wound like a sluggish snake, among the laurel brakes of Dark Hollow. A bullet from Jeff's own rifle was in his brain, and Jeff had ridden straight down to the ford, turned his horse loose, and struck out, they said, straight for the mountains.

She never saw him again, poor Tappine, for he never returned; and after awhile she tried to persuade herself that he was dead. "Wandered away, maybe, somewhars, an' fell off a bluff an' ware kilt," she told herself, "or else some un maybe have murdered of him." Yet she never forgot to be thankful that he escaped the dogs, the track-hounds with which they had set out to hunt him.

The summer waned, the brown leaves were drifting down to fill the deeper hollows of the wood, and one morning Tappine went over to the cottage at Beersheba. For with the coming of the brown autumn Mrs. Ennerly would be going. Tappine found the lady with her couch drawn up before the fire, for the air was chilly already.

They talked of many things, quietly at first, for the lady so well versed in the affairs of the world knew enough of the heart to understand that its griefs are sacred and are jealously guarded even in the hearts of the humblest.

Suddenly Mrs. Ennerly reached her hand and placed it upon Tappine's gently.

"Tappine," said she, "hadn't you

better marry Ben? He is such a good fellow, and would count it all joy just to be allowed to walk by your side, and to care for you. You are young, Tappine, and you've no idea what a sombre thing life is for a woman alone, and unloved. You will feel the loneliness of it as you grow older, and will yearn for the companionship of human sympathy and affection. Couldn't you give Ben the joy of caring for you, Tappine?"

The brown fingers closed with spasmodic strength about the white bejewelled ones. The words had cut like a knife into the wounded heart.

"I couldn't do that, Mis' En'ly," said Tappine. "I couldn't git my own consent ter so harm a man as never harmed me, but jest only loved me. I couldn't do it nohows. Pears like it would in an' about break my heart ter look acrost the table ever' mornin' fur a face I love an' find another face thar. An' ter wake up in the night a-dreamin' it may be of the arms I love, an' daresn't cry out with the pain of disapp'intment even ; fur fear o' troublin' him, the man as loves me, an' I don't love. I couldn't bear it nohows. Pears like 'twould be more lonesomer than 'twould be ter set alone all yer life, with the free right ter think o' him yer love, an' ter sob it ter yer pillow at night, in the dark, an' know it air no sin, because thar be no unloved husband lyin' next of you. Pears like 'twould be more comfortin', jest ter make a sort o' friend o' sorrer. Pears like I'd feel myself a awful coward, jest to marry a man fur fear o' livin' lonesome all my days, an' maybe wantin' of a home an' sech."

The fine lady among her cushions held her book before her face, upon the pretty rounded outlines of which the firelight had been playing pleasantly. As Tappine's low voice died into silence, the book slipped from the slender fingers, and Mrs. Ennerly rose with the quick, impulsive movement of a child. Tappine unconsciously rose at the same time. The lady placed a hand upon either shoulder of the slight figure before her, heavily, bearing the girl down to her knees before the couch upon which she herself dropped wearily among her cushions, and, her hands still pressing the girl's shoulders, began to talk. She talked rapidly, as though afraid she should repent the confidence; her eyes sparkling the while, and her throat, where the lace fell away from it, shining white and polished as marble.

"Tappine," she said, "I am a woman of almost another world than yours. It is impossible we should look at life from the same standpoint, and to some it would seem almost unnatural that we should ever have crossed each other's lives in this friendly, altogether unconventional way. Yet women are women, or *woman* is *woman*, the world over, and possessed of woman's weakness. In this are they alike: every woman has hidden in her heart a grave; under lace or homespun, it makes no difference; the grave is there. Not one but has it. Some sow the spot with deeds of charity, which spring into a sort of blooming after awhile, which serves to hid the grave's unsightly outlines. Some plow it down, level and batter it smooth with the shovel of folly, hoping to hide it from the world's eye. Some go grandly on, bearing their grave with them, scorning disguise and make believe content. They do God's work; do it grandly, bravely; hearing his voice above the sounding of the hollow tombs. Yet, the grave yawns; the soul sorrows, — Tappine! Tappine! — "

She withdrew her hands from the girl's shoulders, and, dropping back upon the couch, buried her face among the silken cushions.

To the ignorant, sorrow-stricken girl watching her, with undisguised surprise, there was something exquisitely sacred in the sudden abandon of grief. She understood so well what sorrow meant; she understood so well that the grave in the lady's heart was open to her sympathetic confidence. Bending over the prostrate figure, she softly stroked the bright waves of her hair lying against the fair temples; a caress in every stroke of the brown fingers.

"Mis' En'ly," the low voice was full of its own natural healing, "I reckin I ought not ter say it, but it somehow helps me mightily ter know as how you-uns have suffered an' been sorrowful, too."

At this reference to her secret, Mrs. Ennerly, in the full tide of the confidence for which her heart had so long hungered, drew the girl to a seat beside her, and, covering the brown hands with her jewelled fingers, said:

"You are a brave girl, Tappine,—a brave girl. I am a coward. I haven't so much as the right to nurse my sorrow and 'make a friend' of it; for I am one of those who wake to find the unloved arms about them, and dare not cry out for fear of hurting him, — my husband.

"Yet, once (every woman has her *once*), I loved a man, oh, so dearly! A man whose very voice made heaven in my life. I met him in the mountains, — not here; no matter where, we met but that one brief autumn-time. Yet those two short months make all the summer of my life's little love. We used to scour the mountain, he and I, horseback, in the golden autumn afternoons. Sometimes we stopped to rest and ramble among the graves of a little old, old graveyard among the mountains, where the dead for more than half a century had slept along the mountain's side. Long abandoned as a burying-ground, the quaint old tombs held charms, fascinations, that I could not describe to you. It was our favourite resort; that quaint, deserted burying-ground.

"One evening, passing the place at sunset, we discovered that some one was being buried there; the sound of voices, and low, suppressed sobs, first warned us we were close upon a funeral procession.

"Full of curiosity, we waited until the train, following their pathetic burden, had passed in among the tombs; then we dismounted and followed, determined to witness the interment.

"It was two babies, little new-born twins, they were laying away to sleep among all that array of old, old dead. Alas! the sadness of it, — the pity! And that graveyard, — that lonely little resting-place among the pines and soughing cedars! I buried my heart there, my youth; all of me that was worth the living I left dead there in that humble little spot among the ancient dead and the new-born babes. I felt it dying while the acorns dropped among the gray tombs; and the leaves, amber and scarlet, and gay purple, went drifting down to fill the hollows of the sunken mounds. Did *he* know? Did he dream I loved him? Did he understand? Did the dead there understand what I had left with them when I rode away in the scarlet sunset?"

She had forgotten the girl at her side; she was communing with her own heart, as she had communed all the lonely years in silence.

"Did he know my heart broke, I wonder, while he told me in that slow, tortuous way of his approaching marriage? Was it nothing to him that the scarlet and amber of my life were dying like the tints upon the autumn? Did he dream I loved him more than God? Did he understand that in the telling of his story, a grave yawned between us, deeper, more real than those ancient, dust-filled hollows at our feet?

"When he lifted me back to my horse, I caught one glimpse of his face: a wild joy thrilled through me. The devil tempted me, Tappine. Did he love her, — that other one who was soon to be his wife? His hand on mine lay half a second, burning, throbbing; one word from me, — and then I put my devil from me, Tappine: I laughed, spoke a careless word of congratulation, mounted, and rode with him away through the scarlet evening, — away into the sombre future. It is all right, child; don't weep so. Sorrow has its compensation, ever: mine has been that I did not speak the word that would have made my happiness, and made her whom he married other than his wife. Throw back the shutter, Teen, and let the light in, child. We've been too long among these graves."

No more was said, ever; from that time the grave in the beautiful woman's heart was closed indeed. To Tappine the confidence was something too sacred, almost, to remember, — a confidence wrung from despair. While for the older woman, the unburdening of her heart had been as a gentle shower to a dry and thirsty land; from henceforth her sorrow was a memory, fair and fond and sacred, rather than a tomb. True, she did not forget the pain of it, but it was a chastened sorrow, something to be remembered at quiet evening times, when peace and gentle summer lay upon the world. And thus did she remember.

And sometimes there came to her fancies, vague and beautiful, that on that other mountain, where her dream was born and perished, she was not forgotten; sometimes, in the quiet evenings, she loved to think of him as lingering in the dewy dusk about the little rural burying-ground, with perhaps a sigh for memory.

But for Tappine, sorrow had not learned to "sob itself to sleep." Could she have known her lover dead, she would have felt less keenly the pain of loving. But always she held a vision of him as of one fleeing, fleeing, for ever fleeing from his pursuers; the bloodhounds upon his track, danger in every bush and brake and gorge. At night she wakened to hear, as part of her troubled and uneasy slumber, the deep, relentless baying of the dogs, and the far-away clatter of hoofs, still fleeing, — fleeing. One morning Ben rode over in hot haste; again the brown mare stood at the gate, the lines tossed lightly over the low palings, while Ben stopped to say a word in low tones to the old grandmother, carding her bats under the crisping leaves that still hung from the eaves of the little porch.

Tappine, the frail body but a shadow among the deeper shadows of the room, sat back among the glooms of the kitchen, her head resting against the spokes of the idle wheel, where her hand had been wont to make gay music in the old glad days of summer.

She lifted her face; an eager, startled look sprang to her eyes as her quick ear caught a carefully spoken name. The next moment she was at Ben's side, the old fires in her eyes and in her heart.

"What is the word you-uns have brought, Ben Cary?" she demanded.

"What is the word you have brought of Jeff?"

Her tone forbade parleying, or subterfuge of any kind. He told her the truth at once.

"Jeff air not run away, Teen," said he. "Or leastways they have tracked him to his hidin'-place. He air hid out in a cabin over yander on Collins River—"

Slowly the last drop of blood left her face; her eyes seemed to burn into him, like coals of fire. He hesitated, but she lifted her hand in majestic command.

"Go on," said she, "go on."

"Well, Teen, I don't know as I ought to tell you, but Jeff have sent word to his folks that he could make out to git away now, since the stir for him air over some, ef he had a horse. But the man he sent the word by,—it ware Jeff's own blood kin, too,—he fetched the word to the sheriff 'stead o' to Jeff's folks, becase thar's a tolerable big reward out fur Jeff fur killin' of the mail-kerrier. I heeard the men talkin' at the tanyard as I come by, and the men allowed as the sheriff would git here from Altamount long befo' the old 'oman, Jeff's mammy, got the word o' his wantin' of a horse. Though to be sure it air a mighty short little cut through to the cabin whar Jeff air in hidin'; *ef* thar ware some one to warn him. It air that old cabin as they useter hold meetin' in till Collins River et the foundation out; jest across the foot-bridge, nigh the old trail. What air you-uns a-goin' ter do, Teen?"

She had pushed past him, and stood a moment in the cabin door, her eyes aflame, her hand lifted.

"Stand out of my way, Ben Cary," she commanded. "Stand out o' my way! Only one word wanted fur a man as be hunted and hounded ter his death, an' you-uns refuse to speak it. I'd hate ter call myse'f a man, an' be you-uns. Stand out o' my way! I ain't got any time to waste on sech as you be."

Mechanically he moved aside. To him

there was something regal in her bearing. A protest came from another quarter, however; the old grandmother planted herself in her path.

"Whar air you a-goin' of, Teen?" she demanded. "It air aginst the laws of the State to holp sech as be runnin' away from jestice. Do you-uns go back in the house, Teen."

Alas! the days of blind obedience were gone.

"Stand out o' the way, granny," said the girl. "This air no time for foolishness."

She turned her back upon the shadows of the house that had indeed been a dwelling-place of shadows for her; her face to the light, and to danger, which was light too, since it was danger incurred for love's sake. The two watched her silently from the little brown porch. Her head made a golden target for the sun's rays as she stood a moment at the gate, and, with a quick, graceful movement, peculiar to the women of the hills, she slipped the bridle-reins from the low palings and tossed them over the brown mare's head. A moment, and she was in the saddle, dexterously twisting the lines into a lash. A stinging blow fell between the ears of the sensitive, half-broken steed, that sent her bounding forward at a rate that must have unseated any but the most fearless of riders. Before the two upon the porch could fully understand her meaning, the sharp, reverberating sound of hurrying hoof-beats came back to them from the road down which the fearless rescuer had disappeared in a cloud of yellow dust.

She had not heard the startled shout of the mare's owner, imploring her not to strike the animal.

"Don't hit her! Don't hit the mare, Teen! She'll plumb break your neck if you hit her!"

But Teen was gone; the mare had shot from the blow dealt her like a ball from a rifle. As the last glimpse of horse and rider vanished, the old woman turned to Ben.

"Go after her!" she shrilled into his startled ears. "Go after her! Ef the mare don't break her neck, the sheriff'll arrest her and fetch her ter jail. Go! thar's a nigh cut through the woods. Run, I tell you! Don't stand thar like a fool an' let my gran'chile be killed."

Breathless and spent, he reached the forks of the road where she must come down the Backbone into the Hollow, beyond which stood the forsaken meeting-house in which the fugitive had taken a temporary refuge. Not once had his ear lost the sound of those hurrying hoof-beats; he could hear them now, as he stood at the crossing to wait for her; away up, high above him, in the air, as it were; those quick, sharp, unerring beats, in even gallop. The mare had not once broken her gait; he remembered that, even in the midst of his fright for the gallant rider, riding at that moment along the narrow, dangerous ledge of the Backbone, — that little wall-like comb that divided two almost impenetrable gulches.

Nearer came the hoof-beats, and nearer; a moment, and clean-cut, an exquisite silhouette against the bright blue of the sky, her hair a banner of floating gold, the mare a chiselling of gleaming bronze, Tappine dashed into view along the Backbone. He watched, breathless and admiring, at the foot of the road where it inclined to the level again.

"It's a God's mercy ef the mare don't kill her befo' she ever gits off o' that thar ridge," he murmured, as the brave beast bore gallantly down, without a swerve or break, towards the forks at the foot of the great ridge. Her courage, the boundless heroism of her love, that brooked neither death nor danger, was to Ben something sublime, grand; something a man might fall down and worship.

"Lord! if I could win a woman like that, ter love me like that —"

The mare was galloping straight on, down the steep incline, as evenly as across the velvety cove-lands; a moment more and she stood upon the narrowest ledge of all that narrow wall. *That* passed, and Tappine might hope for life. Suddenly, far down the Hollow, a shot rang out; some careless hunter, perhaps, on the trail of a fox. But Ben, watching the flying steed dashing along the narrow ledge, gave vent to a sudden startled cry of horror. For one instant the brown mare seemed to literally stand on air, as she lifted herself in one desperate leap before she went crashing down the bluff's side, through brake and bush, carrying her dauntless rider to her death.

THE END

The mare was galloping straight on, down the steeplechase, as evenly as across the velvety race-lands; a moment more and she stood upon the narrowest ledge of all that narrow walk. They passed, and Pepita might have [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of her death.

THE END

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